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# Wordsworth's Mother Tongue: Identification, Separation, and Recognition.

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WORDSWORTH'S MOTHER TONGUE:  
IDENTIFICATION, SEPARATION, AND RECOGNITION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by  
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In memory of Barbara Tuttle Hale,  
and in honor of William McCanless Hale

"Mild Man! he is not gay, but they are gay;  
And the whole house seems filled with gaiety.  
--Thrice happy, then, the Mother may be deemed,  
The Wife, from whose consolatory grave  
I turned, that ye in mind might witness where,  
And how, her Spirit yet survives on Earth."

Book Six, The Excursion

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	viii
CHAPTER	
ONE	INTRODUCTION: WHY WORDSWORTH AND MOTHERS? ..... 1
TWO	MOTHER, NATURE, AND THE POETIC SPIRIT: SIMILARITY, DIFFERENCE, AND RECOGNITION IN BOOK TWO OF <u>THE PRELUDE</u> .....18
THREE	"SIMILITUDE IN DISSIMILITUDE": THE PARADOX OF RECOGNITION IN "THE PREFACE TO <u>LYRICAL BALLADS</u> " .....82
FOUR	THE DANGER OF A MOTHER'S VOICE: OVER-IDENTIFICATION AND "HER EYES ARE WILD" .....139
FIVE	MOTHERS IN MOURNING: VOICE, FIGURATION, AND CONTINUITY .....182
SIX	CONCLUSION .....223
WORKS CITED .....	235
VITA .....	243

## ABSTRACT

This psychoanalytic study complicates prevailing notions about William Wordsworth's representations of mothers. Wordsworth does not invariably conflate mothers with Nature or consistently construct women as silent objects of male quest. Rather, he explores a variety of mothers' voices, often associating them with language acquisition and poetic composition. In early work he acknowledges mothers' significance directly and creates more vocal mothers, while in later work and revisions he often conceals mothers' significance and depicts more object-like mothers.

In the 1805 version of book two of The Prelude, Wordsworth recalls himself as a "blessed babe" who recognizes his mother as a separate subject. From this relationship, the babe derives the "creative" and "receptive" powers of "the poetic spirit" and expands the development of poetic powers to the relationship between child and a Nature personified as a mother. In the 1850 version of book two, however, he objectifies the mother and Nature and reduces their explicit significance on the poetic spirit.

The dynamic of "similitude in dissimilitude," which Wordsworth discusses in "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and which structures much of his poetic theory, is rooted in the mother-child experience of recognition described in The Prelude. Wordsworth splits off mother associations in later

revisions, but an ungendered "maternal" dynamic remains as the matrix for his definition of the Poet.

In "Her Eyes Are Wild," Wordsworth experiments with a mother's voice to depict a filial relationship. He demonstrates the consequences of a mother's over-identification with her child and implies what might happen when poets over-identify with their subjects. In later editions the balladeer finds a more stable voice by identifying with the mother and maintaining self-awareness; however, the mother never achieves such balance.

In "The Sailor's Mother," "The Emigrant Mother," "The Affliction of Margaret," "The Force of Prayer," and "The Widow on Windermere," Wordsworth represents mothers physically separated from their children by distance or death and explores how they resist separation through mourning. The way these mothers articulate their desires often resembles the way poets construct poems: both strive to recollect persons or re-order experiences to accept separation and maintain a sense of connection.

## CHAPTER ONE WHY WORDSWORTH AND MOTHERS?

What does it mean to say that a male author writes the feminine? Is he writing as (identifying with) a woman? Or writing like (mimicking, and perhaps mocking) a woman? Or writing through a woman (an Other that confirms his own identity as the Same)?

Thaïs Morgan, Men Writing the Feminine

An intimate friend of [my mother's] . . . told me that [my mother] once said to her, that the only one of her five children about whose future life she was anxious, was William; and he, she said, would be remarkable either for good or for evil.

"Autobiographical Memoranda Dictated by  
William Wordsworth, P.L., at Rydal Mount,  
November 1847"

Recently, in a posting on the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism's (NASSR) internet-discussion group, a graduate student requested information on breastfeeding in romantic literature:

I've recently become interested in representations of breastfeeding [sic] in Romantic literature. There are, of course, many examples in the six major Romantic poets; I'm hoping to find portrayals of lactation in less canonical authors and (especially) women writers. (Kennedy)

Her request continues with informed background on representations of nursing in romantic literature and references to other scholarly work on the subject. The first response to her request was surprising:

Please, take me off this list. It is devoid of intellectual content. It is just another sounding board for correct-thinking pseudo-intellecs. Nothing at all of any substance.  
"Lactation" in literature, indeed.  
Adios, NASSR-L. (Gordon)

I was alarmed when I read Gordon's response, but pleased when many other scholars came to Kennedy's defense. To say that "'lactation' in literature" is not a valid subject for intellectual inquiry is, after all, to limit literary discussion on broader topics and to exclude groups associated with lactation--namely, mothers and infants.

While my interest in Wordsworth and representations of mothers is broader than Kennedy's, I have received similar puzzled looks, smirks, and comments from colleagues when I have mentioned my dissertation topic. Some may think the topic is inherently without merit, while others may question my precise position as a person and scholar in relation to the topic. For example, one woman peer asked, rather abruptly, "What do you know about mothers? What do you know about being a mother?" After all, I am a man, so the possibility of becoming a biological mother myself, barring some technological innovation, is nil. Further, I have no wife or children, so that I have no close experience with child-raising from a mother's or a father's perspective. But does one have to be a mother in order to write about and try to understand mothers?

Given the topic of this study, my answer to the question is, quite obviously, no. To say that only mothers should write about mothers is almost like saying only women scholars should write about women, and only men scholars should write about men. Women can and should strive to empathize with men's positions and roles just as men should

strive to empathize with women's positions and roles. As a white, middle-class man, I have not only learned a great deal about others with different backgrounds from my own by reading texts by and about women and people of different colors and classes, but I have also learned a great deal about myself. Not only do I think it is acceptable for scholars to write about people in other groups, but I think it is imperative in order to better understand the similarities and differences between others and ourselves.

If I had accepted identity politics in this study, then I could not have explored Wordsworth's poetry in terms of mothers, nor could I have recognized how Wordsworth himself identifies with mothers in his poetry. Further, I could not address the significance of mothers for Wordsworth's poetics. By overcoming identity politics, I am able to examine Wordsworth from a position different from my own; my imagination and intellect enable me to explore mothers' positions just as they allow me to investigate Wordsworth's position.

Indeed, Wordsworth carries out an exploration similar to the one I am proposing as he writes about mothers in his poetry and prose. He, quite obviously, could not be a mother either, but returns again and again to mothers' perspectives in his writing, especially in early work. For example, in Lyrical Ballads (1798), he includes mothers as the primary speakers or as supporting characters in six of the total of nineteen poems in the collection and includes



them in six of his ten narrative poems. Speaking more broadly, almost one hundred poems of the over nine hundred he wrote include mothers. These representations span his career from early to very late. But why would Wordsworth return to this topic again and again?

Wordsworth himself gives a child's bond with a mother special significance in terms of his poetics. In the 1805 version of the blessed babe section of book two of The Prelude, he depicts the child's relationship with the mother as the source of the poetic spirit:

Such, verily, is the first  
Poetic spirit of our human life--  
By uniform controul of after years  
In most abated and suppressed, in some  
Through every change of growth or of decay  
Preeminent till death. (275-280)

If, according to Wordsworth, the child's relationship with the mother is the source of "the Poetic spirit," then a detailed examination of how he constructs that relationship throughout his career is necessary in order to understand his poetry. In fact, Wordsworth's joining of poetic language to mothers makes this juncture an essential topic of analysis.<sup>1</sup>

Biographical data suggests one obvious explanation for why Wordsworth repeatedly represents mothers. The poet's actual mother, Ann Cookson Wordsworth, died of pneumonia in 1778 just before he turned eight years old. As Wordsworth himself remarks in The Prelude, she left him and his siblings "destitute" (1805.5.259).<sup>2</sup> Stephen Gill,

Wordsworth's most recent biographer, notes that such strong diction reveals "how keenly he still felt in adulthood that his mother's death was a vicious blow" (18). Certainly this early separation from his mother could explain why he continued to return to mother figures in poetry throughout his life. His repeated representations could be read as an attempt to restore his own lost mother.<sup>3</sup> While this is not the tack I choose to take, several recent critics have done so.

For example, Richard J. Onorato, in his influential study The Character of the Poet: Wordsworth in The Prelude, views the trauma that Wordsworth endured when Ann Wordsworth died as a defining moment in his development as a poet. He argues that Wordsworth, who strives to recapture the lost mother in The Prelude, is "fixated to a trauma, obsessed by a vital relationship with Nature which has come to stand unconsciously for the lost mother" (64). In her wider-sweeping investigation, The Romantic Mother: Narcissistic Patterns in Romantic Poetry, Barbara A. Schapiro shifts her focus from Onorato's Oedipal perspective and contends that Wordsworth attempts to cope with his pre-Oedipal ambivalence toward the mother: "the loss of the mother at eight would not be the determining psychic trauma; the loss would only reactivate and perhaps intensify an early, preestablished [sic] trauma" (94). Her reading accounts for both the restorative and destructive feelings Wordsworth has for the

mother and a Nature which he substitutes for the mother. Finally, in "The Presence of the Absent Mother in Wordsworth's Prelude," James A.W. Heffernan argues that Wordsworth converts the memory of his early separation in the Two-Part Prelude (1799) into memories of "union and reunion" in the later versions (1805 and 1850), even though "the familial and poetic unity that Wordsworth struggles to construct in the aftermath of primordial separation and division is something never fully achieved in the poem" (272).<sup>4</sup>

All of these studies are valuable contributions to an understanding of Wordsworth's treatment of mothers because they help us understand Wordsworth's struggle with mothers and imagery associated with mothers in The Prelude. However, in Heffernan's terms, they aim "to make the absent mother in Wordsworth's poetry more present and more potent" (253, my emphasis). I depart from these scholars in that I pay more careful attention to Wordsworth's representations of present mothers than to Wordsworth's biography and symbols which Wordsworth uses to represent an absent mother whom he hesitates to represent. While Schapiro mentions several poems about mothers which critics rarely consider, she reads only one poem which represents an actual mother, The Ruined Cottage (which has recently received a fair amount of critical attention). Poems like "The Sailor's Mother," "The Emigrant Mother," and "The Force of Prayer,"

however, have not attracted many readers. I examine the way Wordsworth constructs these women and other mothers; how he or his narrators identify with mothers; and how, in several cases, the represented mothers construct figures of their own. I believe critics rarely read these mother-poems because most of the psychoanalytic methodologies available to them figured mothers as absent others. In this study, I have tried to forge strategies that enable readers to understand these subjectivities by synthesizing recent psychoanalytic theory and Wordsworth's own poetic theory associated with mothers.

In addition, previous critics have focused most of their attention on mothers as objects from whom children must separate in order to develop individual identities.<sup>5</sup> Missing in these studies is an examination of Wordsworth's identification with the mother's position (determining how he is like a mother) and not simply a separation from the mother (determining how he is different from her).<sup>6</sup> The attention to separation is not surprising in light of the bias toward separation in identity formation in most studies of child development. For example, in her influential work, Margaret Mahler (1975) has seen identity development as occurring in a linear pattern from a child's experience of oneness or undifferentiated merger with the mother, to an awareness of separateness.<sup>7</sup> I use more contemporary psychoanalytic materials to investigate the balance between separation and identification that Wordsworth sees as so

significant in developing the poetic spirit, a balance of recognizing the mother as both separate and similar. Recent work by psychoanalytic theorists such as Daniel Stern and Jessica Benjamin helps explain the significance of this balance from both sides of the mother-child dyad.<sup>8</sup> I also investigate how this maternal dynamic of identification and separation is manifest in Wordsworth's poetics as described in "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads," a dynamic of "similitude in dissimilitude" (57) which Wordsworth says is the source of poetic pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Making this connection between mothers and poetic language is my own contribution to Wordsworth studies.

Like Onorato and Heffernan I have a special interest in how Wordsworth revises The Prelude; however, unlike those critics, I also consider his revisions of other poetry and prose. I examine how Wordsworth significantly and subtly alters his representations of mothers over time, and I search for patterns in his changes. Since Wordsworth edited his works so purposefully, his revisions offer a revealing avenue for understanding his attitudes at particular moments in his career. For example, Wordsworth's subtle punctuation changes in "Her Eyes Are Wild" can entirely change a reader's interpretation of the poem. Thanks to the publication of The Cornell Wordsworth series, my task in setting forth those changes has been greatly simplified.

I also read Wordsworth's representations of mothers in light of recent feminist analysis of romantic poetry. For the most part, many feminist critics have tended to understand the six major figures of romantic poetry (Blake, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth) as objectifying women in their poetry and denying them voices. Margaret Homans argues persuasively in Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing that "romantic poetry . . . states most compellingly the traditional myth, as transmitted through literature, of women's place in language as the silent or vanished object of male representation and quest" (40). Other critics, like Anne Mellor and Marlon Ross, have also accepted masculine poets' tendency to objectify women in romantic literature, with many obvious examples in the poetry to support their claim: Wordsworth's Lucy poems, Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and Shelley's Alastor are just a few.<sup>10</sup>

I wish to complicate the predominant notion that since Wordsworth tropes Nature as a mother, he consistently objectifies women. However, I do not wish to argue that Wordsworth is the champion of mothers' subjectivities because he does, in many instances, objectify and silence women and mothers. Rather, I will show that Wordsworth explores a variety of mothers' voices throughout his career; in early poems he tends to acknowledge their significance in his poetry and poetics and his mothers tend to be more

vocal, whereas in later work and revisions he tends to conceal mothers' significance and objectify them. Even though his representations seem to display a chronological linearity from a "good" Wordsworth who represents mothers as subjects to a "bad" Wordsworth who represents mothers as "objects," this pattern also has exceptions.<sup>11</sup> These exceptions reveal a dynamic poet who continues to re-formulate and reconsider attitudes and ideas throughout his career.

Before I go further into a detailed description of the contents of my study, I should more precisely explain my use of the word mother. I define mothers as women who give birth to children. I consider biological activities of mothers, such as lactation, as Wordsworth represents them, and I also consider caregiving activities, since within a nineteenth-century historical context, women were the primary caregivers.<sup>12</sup> As my psychoanalytic approach suggests, I am mostly concerned with how these mothering activities are related to mothers' subjectivities, Wordsworth's representation of these subjectivities, and how his conceptualization of mothers influences his poetry and poetics. Until recently, much of psychoanalytic theory has considered mothers almost as if they were extensions of their children and objects from which children try to separate. I examine mothers not just as objects from which to separate, but as subjects in their own right.<sup>13</sup> More precisely, I examine the way Wordsworth depicts mothers as

having (or not having) thoughts, voices, desires, imaginations, and figurations all their own, and how his depictions influence his poetry and poetics.

One of the complexities of my project is the slippery dynamic between the mother's and child's positions: as a critic, I must resist over-identifying with either position and recognize that the perspectives depend on each other for their definition. Even though my primary interest is the mother's point of view, I will face the difficulty that Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan recognize in their collection Representations of Motherhood: "Even in our attempts to focus directly on maternal subjectivity we frequently found ourselves and our contributors shifting to the vantage point of the child" (8). However, I do not necessarily consider slipping into the child's position detrimental so long as I detect such moments; because of the mutual dependency of the positions, slippage is inevitable and helps to foreground the dynamic interplay in the mother-child relationship.

Before beginning my analysis in detail, I will describe some of the contents of my study. In chapter two I discuss the "blessed babe's" early relationship with his mother as Wordsworth depicts it in the 1805 and 1850 versions of The Prelude: in the 1805 version the child recognizes the mother as a separate subject, but in 1850 he views her as more of an object. I further argue that in the 1805 edition Wordsworth gradually progresses from representing the



child's recognition of the mother as subject to a recognition of a personified maternal Nature who is like a subject. Similarly, Wordsworth initially associates the poetic spirit, the powers of "creator and receiver both," with the mother, but then he transfers his association to a mothering Nature. I argue that for Wordsworth the receptive and creative powers of the imagination are derived first from the relation with the mother and then are expanded to become the relation with Nature. The early Wordsworth can accept the subject status of the mother and see her significance in his poetics, but the later Wordsworth must objectify her. If he constructs her as an object, he avoids the danger of appearing to be dependent on her.

In chapter three I argue that the dynamic of "similitude in dissimilitude" which Wordsworth discusses in "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" is rooted in the early mother-child experience of recognition as described in the blessed babe section of The Prelude. This dynamic of separation and connection structures much of Wordsworth's poetic theory even though he splits off explicit associations with the mother as he revises the Preface. With the major addition of the section on the Poet and the deletion of the description of the poetic techniques used to explore the mind, Wordsworth displays anxiety over associating the mother with his poetics. Even though he elides or displaces ostensibly gendered associations of the mother with poetry as he revises, an ungendered maternal

dynamic remains significant. While this "ungendered" dynamic is safer for Wordsworth because it does not connote a gendered dependence on the mother, the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude serves as the matrix for Wordsworth's definition of the Poet and his exploration of the mind.

In chapter four I examine "Her Eyes Are Wild," a poem in which Wordsworth anxiously represents a mother's voice, framed by an outside balladeer, to depict an early mother-infant relationship. With the mother's voice he demonstrates the consequences of over-identification: psychosis and semiosis--a voice characterized by extreme semiotic activity (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning). He implicitly demonstrates what might happen when a poet over-identifies with his subject: a poem without boundaries and a very unstable meaning. However, with the narrator's voice Wordsworth provides an alternative; the narrator has the ability to maintain balance, to identify with the other, but at the same time to maintain a self-awareness, and he thus provides a much more stable, poetic voice. In early editions Wordsworth represents both the balladeer and mother losing the balance of similitude in dissimilitude, but in later editions he signals the balladeer's balance while the mother remains unbalanced. Over time, Wordsworth's revisions gradually separate the balladeer's voice from the mother's, and he more carefully marks them as separate entities. The mother

gradually loses her mental stability and becomes obsessed with identification with her son. She does not experience the "being with" of separation and connection (as the blessed babe of The Prelude does), but instead attempts to merge her identity with him through extreme identification and projection.

In chapter five I investigate poems in which mothers are physically separated from their children by distance and/or death and explore how the mothers resist this separation. These mothers attempt to mourn their children and recreate versions of them by various means. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that infants do this when they begin to use symbolic activity: when the maternal figure, usually female, is absent, the child uses objects or language to try to replace her as in Freud's fort/da example.<sup>14</sup> What is interesting in Wordsworth's poetry is that he not only portrays this sort of dynamic from the perspective of children (as in book two of The Prelude), but that he also repeatedly portrays it from mothers' perspectives: adult mothers produce figures (linguistically or concretely) in order to help mourn the losses of children. In early poems he seems more willing to experiment with giving women voices, even though he generally frames them with external narrators, but in later poems, the narrators become more dominant, and the mothers are gradually silenced. In representing mothers who

articulate and fulfill their desires to varying degrees, Wordsworth constructs mothers who are not always simply objects of desire themselves, as much contemporary criticism suggests. The symbolizations that Wordsworth represents some of these mothers producing are like the poet's constructions of poems. The poet and these mothers both strive to recollect or re-order original experiences or experience with people to accept their separation from the experiences/people and at the same time maintain a sense of connection to them.

Throughout this study, I wish to complicate the way we read Wordsworth's poetry in terms of gender and free him from the box in which some critics have confined him. I will show how Wordsworth's attitude toward mothers changes throughout his career and how he uses a variety of mothers' voices to achieve his poetic ends. These readings allow us to break free from critical paradigms which encourage readers to interpret literature through the lens of polar opposites: female/male, community/individual, connection/separation. These readings invite us to look more closely at a figure that embodies the complexity of paradox: the mother who is perceived as object and subject; as like the child, and different; as silent and speaking. Wordsworth views these paradoxes, and others, as a central part of the poetic spirit and poetic language, and it is through analysis of these paradoxes that I hope to recover the "present" mother in Wordsworth's poetry and prose.

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Homans discusses this jointure as well in Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing. I discuss and critique Homans's analysis in chapter two (46-52).

<sup>2</sup>In discussions of The Prelude I rely on Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill's Norton Critical Edition unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Onorato makes this argument in terms of The Prelude in The Character of the Poet.

<sup>4</sup> Peter J. Manning links the death of Ann Cookson Wordsworth to the relation between Margaret and the Pedlar in "The Ruined Cottage." Thomas R. Frosch uses water imagery (with which he says Wordsworth associates the mother) to argue for the unity of book five of The Prelude in "Wordsworth and the Matrix of Romance: The Prelude, Book V."

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Hirsch's introduction to The Mother-Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (1-27) provides useful background on the tendency of feminist criticism to view mother-daughter narratives from the daughter's point of view.

There are a number of recent books on mothers in literature. A few, which I do not mention in later notes include: Deborah Clarke's Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner has a very useful introduction on approaches to mothers in literature; Wilma Garcia's Mothers and Others: Myths of the Female in the Works of Melville, Twain, and Hawthorne provides a more general examination of mothers in American literature; Garner, Kahane, and Sprengnether's collections The (M)other Tongue: Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation contains a variety of essays from feminist, psychoanalytic perspectives; Kathleen Hickok's Representations of Women: Nineteenth Century British Women's Poetry has a useful chapter on women's representations of mothers during the period; and Mary Jacobus's First Things: The Maternal Imaginary in Literature, Art, and Psychoanalysis uses psychoanalytic and historical theory to approach representations of mothers.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Onorato repeatedly discusses the child's need to identify with the father, but only addresses Wordsworth's identification with a mother once (in book thirteen) and characterizes this as a "peculiar" instance (73).

<sup>7</sup> See Mahler's The Psychological Birth of the Infant.

<sup>8</sup> See Stern's The Interpersonal World of the Infant and The Motherhood Constellation, and Benjamin's The Bonds of Love.

<sup>9</sup> See Zall's Wordsworth's Literary Criticism for the 1802 edition of "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

<sup>10</sup> In her introduction to Romanticism and Feminism, Mellor says, "The six male poets have been heralded because they endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over and gives significance to nature, a nature troped in their writings as female. They thus legitimized the continued repression of women" (8). In The Contours of Masculine Desire Ross argues that the female companion "allows the poet an external object (as an aspect of her otherness) to move toward in order to make real (to realize) his internal need (because she is also seen as an aspect of the self)" (93).

<sup>11</sup> In one late poem in particular, "Maternal Grief" (1842), Wordsworth represents a mother with a complex subjectivity and voice.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Stickney Ellis's The Mothers of England; Their Influence and Responsibility (1844) provides a detailed description of mothers' actual duties and responsibilities in nineteenth-century England.

<sup>13</sup> I follow the lead of recent psychoanalytic theorists Daniel Stern and Jessica Benjamin and a variety of critics and theorists whose work is presented in Bassin, Honey, and Kaplan's recent collection Representations of Motherhood.

<sup>14</sup> See Beyond the Pleasure Principle for Freud's discussion of the fort/da game (14-17).

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**MOTHER, NATURE, AND THE POETIC SPIRIT: SIMILARITY,**  
**DIFFERENCE, AND RECOGNITION IN BOOK TWO OF THE**  
**PRELUDE**

Blessed the infant babe--  
For with my best conjectures I would trace  
The progress of our being--blest the babe  
Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps  
Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul  
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,  
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.

Book Two, The Prelude (1805)

The earliest transitional experience forms a  
continuum with the most developed capacities for  
contemplation and creativity, for discovering the  
outside as an object existing in its own right.

Jessica Benjamin, The Bonds of Love

As The Prelude's subtitle indicates, Wordsworth aims to  
chart the "Growth of the Poet's Mind" in his epic  
autobiographical poem. He remarks in book two that his goal  
is not an easy one:

Hard task, vain hope to analyse the mind,  
If each most obvious and particular thought,  
Not in a mystical and idle sense,  
But in the words of Reason deeply weighed,  
Hath no beginning. (1850.228-232)<sup>1</sup>

Part of Wordsworth's "task" in book two is to return to the  
"beginning," to the source of personal identity and thought.<sup>2</sup>  
However, several more specific questions which Wordsworth  
strives to answer surround his broad, ambitious goal: how  
does one gain a sense of identity? how does one attain an  
awareness of the outside, of the other? how does one express  
through language an awareness of self, other, and the

relationship between the two? and how are a poet's development and language different from that of a non-poet?

To answer these questions, Wordsworth explores early childhood and especially an infant's relationship with "his" mother.<sup>3</sup> He associates the "poetic spirit" directly with identity formation and language acquisition and shows how this spirit may develop from a child's simultaneous identification with the mother as similar ("I am like you") and separation from the mother as a separate entity ("I am different from you"). Wordsworth's explanations of personal identity, poetic identity, language, and their relationship to the mother are complicated by the fact that he revises The Prelude numerous times between 1799 and 1839; consequently, the edition one chooses to read greatly influences how one understands Wordsworth. In the 1805 version he most clearly values the mother-child relationship as the source of the poetic spirit, but in the 1850 edition (posthumously based on his 1839 revisions), he reduces the significance of that relationship and places greater emphasis on the babe's relationship with Nature as the matrix for poetic power. This revision displays his continuing anxiety in associating the child-mother relationship with poetic creation. Even though in 1850 Wordsworth still values the relationship with the mother as the source of the poetic spirit to a degree, he reduces his association of the mother with that spirit without splitting that association off entirely.<sup>4</sup> If we read Wordsworth's body



of work from the perspective of The Prelude of 1850 (as most readers have done because of editorial practice<sup>5</sup>), we are more likely to view the poet and the poetry as unsympathetic to women and mothers, often objectifying them, and constructing the poet as a stronger, more traditionally "masculine" and independent figure. On the other hand, if we read his body of work from the perspective of the 1805 edition, we can begin to see the poetry and the poet as valuing women and mothers, as more often constructing or representing women as subjects, and creating a poetic persona which is a less static, more traditionally "feminine" and interdependent figure.

### **Imagining Difference**

To imagine a child's early development of an individuated identity and his/her acquisition of language is a curious task. As Daniel Stern notes, it is "something like wondering what the universe might have been like the first few hours after the big bang" (3). Before I begin to focus on Wordsworth's poetry and his account of early child development, I will outline some of the psychoanalytic assumptions on which I base my reading of Wordsworth. I use this theoretical apparatus to help explain how Wordsworth's understanding of the poetic spirit is rooted in the early relationship with the mother even though he later retreats to a more mystical or innate account of the spirit. While interesting parallels may be made between Wordsworth's theory and contemporary theories of child development, my

aim is not simply to engage in comparison. In what follows, I will look at several theories by analysts and critics such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Melanie Klein, Madelon Sprengnether, and Jessica Benjamin. I critique and synthesize these theories in order to suggest that children do not necessarily need to separate completely from mothers, nor do they require fathers to acquire language, that children's connection to and separation from mothers are both important parts of language acquisition and identity development, and that children learn to use the musical qualities of language like rhythm and meter from their early relationships with mothers. After constructing my paradigm, I will use this theoretical base as a tool to illuminate my reading of The Prelude where Wordsworth values the mother-child bond as the source of the poetic spirit more strongly in early editions and suppresses or reduces the mother's significance in later editions.

One of the fundamental assumptions of many psychoanalytic theories (and one that Wordsworth explores in The Prelude) is that identity development is built upon an individual's awareness of difference. Jacques Lacan's version of such development has been a dominant account in literary studies and is a useful beginning to elucidate difference because he focuses attention on the child's development of both self and language.<sup>6</sup> Basing his work on studies by Freud and object relations theorists, Lacan says

infants initially exist in a state in which they cannot distinguish between subject (the child) and object (the mother or her substitutes). He calls this state the imaginary by which he means, as Eagleton explains, "a condition in which we lack any defined centre of self, in which what 'self' we have seems to pass into objects, and objects into it, in a ceaseless closed relation" (164).<sup>7</sup> While in this state, infants communicate with their mothers through a non-figurative activity--Julia Kristeva calls this the semiotic--which consists of body movements and non-representational sounds like tone and rhythm and which has "an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not yet refer . . . to a signified object" (Kristeva 133, my italics). Lacan says that the mirror stage--the point (six-eighteen months) at which a child can "recognize as such his own image in a mirror"--is the point which "projects the formation of the individual into history" (Lacan 1, 4). The mirror stage marks the beginning of the end of the imaginary stage and is the interval in which the child begins to arrive at an awareness of an 'I' when the 'I' is reflected back by a person or external object (usually the mother).<sup>8</sup>

However, in Lacan's system, when children become aware of the difference between their mothers and fathers because they notice the phallus,<sup>9</sup> children unconsciously learn that signs, previously only images, have meaning because of their

difference from other signs (around eighteen months). They also learn that signs "presuppose" the absence of the objects they signify (Eagleton 166).<sup>10</sup> The phallus stands as the primary signifier because "the apparent owner of the phallus, of the marker of difference, is he who speaks," so the child "enters what Lacan calls the 'Law of the Father,' or the symbolic order" (Homans 7).<sup>11</sup> This Law is both the "prohibition of incest with the mother . . . and the sign system that depends on absence and the absence of the referent." More precisely, the lack in the sense of not having the phallus and in the sense of desiring the phallus simultaneously encourages the child enthusiastically to enter the Law of the Father, because only symbolic language allows the "bridging of the gap between child and mother opened up by the simultaneous arousal and prohibition of incest" (7). The consequence is that Lacan calls verbal language desire. Desire figures the difference between ("ratio of") appetite for love and demand (ultimatum) for love of the mother. To enter the symbolic order successfully, the male child substitutes desire for his mother with heterosexual desire for other women and language as desire (7-8).<sup>12</sup>

To summarize Lacan's system, when the child becomes aware of the father, he unconsciously realizes that the father possesses the mother, and that he does not; thus, the father's perceived arrival prohibits (the child becomes

aware of the father's prohibition) the child's perceived blissful possession of (incest with) the mother. The boy simultaneously notes the father's phallus (the marker of difference) which he attributes to the father's possession of the mother, represses his desire, and consequently begins to replace or signify the mother (the prohibited object) with symbolic language.<sup>13</sup>

### **Difference and The Mother**

The Lacanian phallogocentric model gives the father a very special position in that he helps the child become aware of difference, the child's separateness from the mother. However, other theorists note the possibility of becoming aware of difference without the father. For example, Luce Irigaray suggests that the child can begin to notice difference much sooner and views the anxiety which Freud, Lacan, and object relations theorists attribute to the Oedipus complex and castration as occurring after delivery. Building on the work of Otto Rank, she sees "the cutting of the umbilical cord as the child's original trauma: the father and his 'nom' [name] merely function to cover over the 'nombril'--the scar which is the first and foremost trace of identity and the perpetual reminder of an initial traumatic rupture" (Hirsch 134).<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Melanie Klein associates differentiation with the mother. She says the infant experiences "aggressive anxieties, frustrations, and splitting . . . in

relation to the breast" (Doane 8).<sup>15</sup> Doane and Hodges point to a specific example in Klein's work in which a child who is late in engaging in symbolic activity is briefly separated from her mother in a series of instances. The child begins to speak because of the anxiety resulting from a separation from her mother, not because of the awareness of a phallus-bearing father. Doane and Hodges note that Lacan's account emphasizes "castration (the threat that breaks up the mother-child dyad), an emphasis that Klein refuses. It also sets up an opposition between maternal and paternal spheres that is closer to Winnicott's work than Klein's" (26). Thus, the complete identification that has been attributed to the pre-Oedipal phase is from the very beginning seen to be bound up in difference and separateness stirred by feelings of anxiety.

Madelon Sprengnether concurs:

If as Freud sometimes hints, and Derrida everywhere insists, the condition of castration (or separation from the mother as representative of the dream of plenitude) is both originary and universal, the process of enculturation begins with the onset of life itself. (243)

Irigaray, Klein, and Sprengnether pose alternative sites for difference which break down the hierarchical relationship between the realms of the mother and father. Separation appears to begin earlier and to progress more gradually; from this perspective, the identity that results from separation is perceived as dynamic instead of fixed.<sup>16</sup>

What are the implications of this notion of pre-Oedipal difference on subject formation and language? First, if an awareness of difference can become a possibility without the father's intervention, then the child's relationship with the mother as primary caregiver takes on even greater significance. The father's presence (as we will see in Wordsworth's account of language acquisition in book two of The Prelude) becomes an inessential factor in a child's development of symbolic activity. Second, if, as object relations theory indicates, a child begins to form an object cathexis for the mother before becoming aware of the father, then a feeling of separation, of difference, of identity must precede the Oedipus complex. Separation resulting from the birth trauma, cutting the umbilical cord, being weaned from the breast, or some other trauma leads to anxiety and anxiety leads to an awareness of difference. From this perspective, language and identity development are not so neatly structured as in the purely Lacanian system. A variety of incidents associated with the mother and not the father may generate the feelings of difference and separateness which consequently lead to symbolic activity.<sup>17</sup>

#### **The Other Side: Recognition and the Intersubjective View**

As previously discussed, many theories of psychological development stress the importance of autonomy and separation and slight the significance of relatedness and connectedness for identity formation and language acquisition.<sup>18</sup> Jessica

Benjamin's view of intersubjective theory, lucidly presented in The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination, shifts the focus to connectedness in the child's early bond with the mother, a connectedness which is not viewed as necessarily incestuous as in the Lacanian and Kristevan paradigms.<sup>19</sup> For Benjamin, intersubjective theory is based on the premise that individuals develop through relationships with other subjects. She maintains that individuals can and need to recognize others as both similar and different, that others share similar mental experiences with the individual. Benjamin clearly distinguishes between an intrapsychic view and an intersubjective view: while the intrapsychic perspective conceptualizes the person as "a discrete unit with a complex internal structure," the intersubjective perspective "describes capacities that emerge in the interaction between self and others." Even when intersubjective theory describes the self alone, it views the self's "aloneness as a particular point in the spectrum of relationships rather than as the original, 'natural state' of the individual." The significant area explored with intrapsychic theory is the unconscious; the vital element we investigate with intersubjective theory is "the representation of self and other as distinct but interrelated beings" (20).

While intrapsychic theory foregrounds difference or the self's awareness of distinctness from others,



intersubjective theory balances difference and separation with sameness and identification in the phenomenon of recognition: "that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self."<sup>20</sup> Recognition leads the self to become aware of its individuated agency and can only "come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right" (12). In moments of recognition children conceptualize mothers as subjects and not simply as objects to utilize for their own development. Recognition is "the essential response, the constant companion of assertion. The subject declares, 'I am, I do,' and then waits for the response, 'You are, you have done.'" For mutual recognition to take place, mothers must not simply function as object-like mirrors to reflect the children's assertions back to them, but must also cast back something of the not-me with a will of their own (21).

### **Semiotic, Symbolic, and Incest**

The intersubjective view has room for my interpretation of Kristeva's notion of the semiotic with which I associate sameness and identification and the symbolic with which I associate difference and differentiation. I use both these terms to describe activities (actual manifestation of, the action of) as well as states (one predominates though does not exclude the other) and not mutually exclusive languages. One might suppose that a child progresses from using a

purely semiotic to a symbolic language.<sup>21</sup> However, these phenomena may be more accurately viewed as occurring along a spectrum, a spectrum Kristeva defines in the preface to

Desire in Language:

if the overly constraining and reductive meaning of a language made up of universals [the symbolic] causes us to suffer, [then] the call or the unnamable . . . issuing from those borders where signification vanishes [the semiotic], hurls us into the void of a psychosis that appears henceforth as the solidary reverse of our universe, saturated with interpretations, faith, or truth. Within that vise, our only chance to avoid being neither master nor slave of meaning lies in our ability to insure our mastery of it (through technique or knowledge) as well as our passage through it (through play or practice). In a word, jouissance. (X)<sup>22</sup>

Her aim is not to privilege one activity over another, but to show how we need to understand the relationship between semiotic and symbolic activity and how informed play with these activities can lead to pleasure.

Two ways to understand and enjoy this relationship are to study and create poetic language. In "From One Identity to An Other" Kristeva characterizes poetic language in relation to the semiotic and symbolic. She associates the semiotic with poetic language by discussing a heterogeneousness to meaning and signification in poetic language. Kristeva locates this heterogeneousness, or difference to meaning, in infants' first echolalias as non-sensical rhythms and intonations (semiotic) and says they precede the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences (symbolic). The semiotic later manifests itself

in verbal language as rhythms and tone and operates "through, despite, and in excess of" signification (the symbolic). In poetic language the semiotic produces both musical and "nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself" (133). For Kristeva, the semiotic is present in any language, but it is present to a greater degree in poetic language.<sup>23</sup> She says that even though the semiotic may result in syntactic ellision which makes an utterance's meaning undecidable, no matter how extremely semiotic processes may elide, attack, or corrupt the symbolic function in poetic language, "the symbolic function nonetheless maintains its presence" (134).

Kristeva more explicitly explains the semiotic activity which disrupts the symbolic in poetic language as a mark of the working of a child's instinctual drives and as rooted in the child's relation with the mother. Further, she says semiotic processes prepare speakers for symbolic processes. In other words, the symbolic only establishes itself by breaking with the semiotic "which is retrieved as 'signifier,' 'primary processed,' displacement and condensation, metaphor and metonymy, rhetorical figures--but which always remains subordinate . . . to the principal function of naming-predicating." Language as symbolic function establishes itself "by repressing instinctual drive and continuous relations to the mother" (136). On the other hand, in poetic language speakers maintain themselves "at

the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element." Just as Lacan does, she posits that if the prohibition of incest establishes the symbolic order (symbolic language and women as objects of exchange), then poetic language becomes a sort of incest--a transgressive re-merging with the mother which "prevents the word from becoming mere sign [it is multi-valent] and the mother from becoming an object like any other [because forbidden]" (136). Because of its closer link to the uncertain, unfixed unconscious which is nurtured in the relationship with the mother, poetic language itself is more unfixed and uncertain--though not completely. Kristeva carefully notes that "this reinstatement of maternal territory into the very economy of language does not lead its questioned subject-in-process to repudiate its symbolic disposition" (137). The reinstatement simply increases "the interplay of meaning" to a greater degree in poetic language than it does in practical language.<sup>24</sup> Poetic language, like practical language, is a combination of semiotic and symbolic language; however, poetic language, more consciously than practical language, employs the semiotic component--the sound, the meter, the material part of language.

\* \* \*

While the traditional Freudian and Lacanian models mandate a triangular, three-term system which leads to identity development and language acquisition, my revisions of these models with object relations, feminist, and

intersubjective theory suggest that identity development and language acquisition do not insist on the father as a third term. Additionally, intersubjective theory suggests that in order to get a more complete view of identity formation, connectedness with the mother as subject should be considered in conjunction with the differentiation that the intrapsychic model foregrounds. Furthermore, there appear to be two primary language activities, the semiotic and symbolic, which constitute various types of language (i.e., poetic and scientific). Traditionally, the semiotic is related to the child's relationship with the mother in which difference is not perceived among objects, and the symbolic is related to the child's relationship with the father in which difference is perceived. My revision shows that the child may engage in both activities as a result of the relationship with the mother as primary caregiver--no third term is necessarily required.<sup>25</sup> In addition, I argue that in poetic language, the semiotic is especially important. Semiotic activity, by definition, brings qualities like tone, rhythm, and music to language, and it consequently disrupts the certainty, the fixity of more symbolic language activity. Semiotic activity, which is unfixed, uncertain, and related to the unconscious, is considered by Lacan and Kristeva as incestuous because it links the child to the mother; I use the intersubjective view to reduce this transgressive stigma because I view relatedness positively and the relationship with the mother more figuratively (less

literally). Although the semiotic is generally repressed, it is manifested in everyday language to a degree and more explicitly exhibited in poetic language in which the multi-valent quality it bestows is valued.

In the next section, I turn directly to Wordsworth's attitudes about language acquisition, identity formation, the poetic spirit, and poetic language. The theoretical apparatus that I have synthesized provides a critical vocabulary outside Wordsworth's own with which to discuss his theories and with which to better understand the revisions he makes in book two of The Prelude. Over time, he significantly represses the significance of the child's bond with the mother as the matrix for the poetic spirit and places greater emphasis on a maternally personified Nature.

### **The Blessed Babe and the Poetic Spirit**

In the famous blessed babe section of book two of The Prelude (1799.267-310; 1805.236-280; 1850.232-265), Wordsworth examines the early relationship of a child with his mother and implies that it shapes the "Poetic spirit" (1805.276).<sup>26</sup> The 1799 and 1805 versions of this passage are nearly identical and in them Wordsworth emphasizes the importance of the filial bond more directly than in the 1850 edition. He conceptualizes the mother as more like a subject in 1805 while he represents her as more like an object in 1850: in 1805 the child appears to identify with the mother while in 1850 he draws strength from her. The

drastic deletions of and additions to the 1850 edition illuminate Wordsworth's attitudes and anxieties about the mother-child relationship: by ultimately conceptualizing the mother as more of an object by 1850, he establishes himself as more of an independent, self-sufficient poet.

In 1805 Wordsworth writes,

Blessed the infant babe--  
 For with my best conjectures I would trace  
 The progress of our being--blest the babe  
 Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps  
 Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul  
 Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,  
 Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.  
(1805. 236-242)

Acknowledging his uncertainty of recalling infantile experience as a "best conjecture," Wordsworth foregrounds the importance of an individual's development as beginning with the child's relationship with the mother.<sup>27</sup> The image of the child "gathering passion from his mother's eye," of looking into the eye and seeing himself reflected back resembles Lacan's mirror stage, the stage at which children look into mirrors and begin to recognize themselves as objects. However, Wordsworth's formulation differs from Lacan's in that in this instance the child looks into a more organic mirror and Wordsworth emphasizes the feeling of "kindred" that results from this mutual gaze and not simply the child's separateness which the mirror stage emphasizes. The blessed babe does appear to have some sense of separateness as he gathers passion, but at this point, he feels more connected to than separated from the mother.

The mutual gaze image is also a typical figure from Renaissance poetry which plays on the eye/I homonym, and which is most commonly employed when discussing an erotic relationship.<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth's use of the image suggests a close, almost erotic, identification of the child with the mother which is reinforced by the child's soul "claim[ing] manifest kindred with his mother's soul." The child experiences connectedness with or similarity to the mother as well as a sense of agency in his "gathering." While the child does not appear to have fully developed senses of self and other at this point, he does seem to have, in Daniel Stern's words, an emergent sense of self and other, a "global subjective world of emerging organization [which] is and remains the fundamental domain of human subjectivity" (Intersubjective 67). The child strives to organize his agency and affectivity in relation to an outside other even though he has not quite organized it yet.

Wordsworth alters the eye image drastically by 1850. Instead of "gather[ing] passion from his mother's eye," the child "Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!" (1850.237); by 1850, the child no longer "Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul" (1805.241). Instead of alluding to a sort of eroticized or aggressive relationship with the Renaissance conceit, he suppresses the image of "passion" and replaces it with a more conventional allusion to breast-feeding to describe the bond. The change from



passion to feelings also reduces the erotic/aggressive connotations and shifts to connotations of sensation. With this revision Wordsworth constructs the mother as more of an object to feed on and less of a subject with which to identify. This tension between mother as object and subject permeates book two in both editions, but by 1850, he conceptualizes the mother as more of an object from the very beginning of his description.<sup>29</sup>

Wordsworth reinforces this objectifying effect by 1850 with a major deletion of fourteen lines. In 1805 he marks the relationship between the child's relationship with the mother and his ensuing relationship with Nature. He resolves that feelings of distinct similarity derived from the relationship with the mother

pass into his torpid life  
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind,  
Even in the first trial of his powers,  
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine  
In one appearance all the elements  
And parts of the same object, else detached  
And loth to coalesce. Thus day by day  
Subjected to the discipline of love,  
His organs and recipient faculties  
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind  
spreads,  
Tenacious of the forms which it receives  
In one beloved presence. (244-255, my emphasis)

These feelings of identification with the mother, feelings of a sort of blissful merger, lead the child to combine all images into one. The "discipline of love" derived from the relationship with the mother (that "earthly soul") leads his mind to reach out and to receive all external forms "In one beloved presence."

Yet as Benjamin reminds us, the reason why such experiences of merging have "high emotional impact" is because "self and other are not [actually] merged." The "externality of the other makes one feel one is truly being 'fed' . . . from the outside, rather than supplying everything for oneself." In reality, this experience of "being with," of the one beloved presence, is actually based on "a continually evolving awareness of difference, on a sense of intimacy felt as occurring 'between the two of us'" (47), an experience which Wordsworth marks as gradually occurring "day by day" (250). At this moment, the child tests the boundaries between self and other (between separation and connection) even though he does not yet clearly distinguish between them.

In the 1799 and 1805 versions, the relationship with the mother leads the child to combine all forms into one unified form, but in the 1850 edition Wordsworth reduces the significance of this mother-child relationship. He omits this detailed discussion which explicitly links the power of combination to the relationship with the mother (244-257 in the 1805 edition). From the child who "Drinks in the feelings of the Mother's eye!" Wordsworth progresses directly in the same stanza to "For him, in one dear Presence" (1850.238). The speaker of 1850 does not explain the source of "one dear Presence" while the speakers of 1799 and 1805 explain and consequently foreground the maternal source in great detail. Wordsworth, in effect, links the

"one dear Presence" of 1850 to the child's relationship with "the forms which it receives" (personified Nature), and this substitution of Nature into the mother's position consequently diminishes the actual mother's importance, a mother who, like the child, is a subject, an "earthly soul." In 1799 and 1805, Wordsworth explicitly associates the "one beloved presence" which eventually leads to poetic power with the child's relationship with the mother, but by 1850, he obscures (but does not erase) the relationship's significance and more clearly correlates it with Nature.

In all three versions, the next section is almost identical:

From this beloved presence--there exists  
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
 All objects through all intercourse of sense.  
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed;  
 Along his infant veins are interfused  
 The gravitation and the filial bond  
 Of Nature that connect him with the world.  
(1805.258-264)

Here Wordsworth emphasizes both the elevation of all objects because they are joined together in the "beloved presence" and the feeling of communion ("no outcast he"), of connection that the infant feels. He experiences no "trouble" at this point which will cause him to feel anxious ("bewildered and depressed") and consequently enable him to note difference more self-consciously. In 1799 and 1805 the source of this exalted feeling has been the relationship with the mother, but at this point in the 1850 edition he moves to another relationship: "The gravitation and filial

bond / Of Nature that connect him with the world." In the two earlier versions, Wordsworth has presented a progression from the bond with the mother to the bond with Nature: if all external objects are to be merged together in one beloved presence, it seems logical that the child would begin with the immediate object (the mother) and move to more distant and more general objects (Nature).<sup>30</sup>

However, by deleting the description of the source of the "beloved presence" (the mother) in the 1850 edition, Wordsworth does not so clearly connect the filial bond with the mother to the bond with Nature. By 1850, the connection to Nature seems more innate. The "virtue" of the "one dear Presence" simply "exists"; the virtue is not so clearly "derived" as in the earlier editions. In the 1850, it is as the child's soul, having once drunk from the Mother's eye, is ready to move onto another stage of drinking from Nature: the child simply seems to incorporate both mother and Nature into himself. In the earlier editions, the original connection to the mother remains more important; Wordsworth displays the dynamic shift from mother to Nature without displacing the mother. Wordsworth includes details in the earlier editions which explicitly elevate the importance of a mother, but in the later edition he suppresses the details and stresses the union with Nature so that the power to combine seems more innate. In the early editions the clear distinction between mother and Nature and the dependence of the bond with Nature on the bond with the mother, again,

gives Nature greater significance as a sort of substitute for the mother, a substitute which is both literally Nature and figuratively mother.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, the distinction and dependence foregrounds the possibility of conceptualizing personified Nature as a subject like the mother instead of simply as an object as in the later version. Nature cannot actually be a subject, but Wordsworth conceptualizes "her" as such, a subject like the mother in 1805.

In the 1850 edition, Wordsworth makes an addition to this section that further emphasizes the importance of the bond with Nature but also implies the maternal bond:

Is there a flower, to which he [child] points with  
hand  
Too weak to gather it, already love  
Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him  
Hath beautified that flower; already shades  
Of pity cast from inward tenderness  
Do fall around him upon aught that bears  
Unsightly marks of violence or harm. (245-251)

In this instance, Wordsworth again alludes to the breast-feeding metaphor with "love's purest earthly fount" and very subtly seems to point back to the maternal relationship as the source of the love that connects him to Nature.

However, Wordsworth's mother-fount parallel continues the 1850's objectification of the mother as a source from which to "draw" love instead of more strongly implying the status of subject that 1799 and 1805 present without the fount conceit.

At the beginning of the conclusion to the blessed babe section, in 1805 and 1850 Wordsworth writes that

"Emphatically such a being [the infant] lives," but in 1850 Wordsworth finds the being is "frail" and "helpless" while in 1805 he leaves a more powerful impression of an assertive infant. In 1805 Wordsworth emphasizes the give and take relationship between the infant and the external world more than in 1850. In 1805 he indicates that "From Nature largely he receives, nor so / Is satisfied, but largely gives again" (267-8) before claiming that

For feeling has to him imparted strength,  
And--powerful in all sentiments of grief,  
Of exultation, fear and joy--his mind,  
Even as an agent of the one great mind,  
Creates, creator and receiver both,  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds. (269-274)

The "giving" and "receiving" mind of 1805 reinforces the idea that the mind is "creator and receiver both."<sup>32</sup> In 1850, Wordsworth does not characterize the mind as "receiving" and "giving," and he also diminishes the comparison of the human mind with the "one great mind" (presumably God). In 1805 he writes that the human mind functions "Even as an agent of the one great mind" (my emphasis): as connotes more of a sameness between the human mind and "the one great mind," and the adverb even serves to intensify as. However in 1850, he writes that "growing faculties of sense / Doth like an agent of the one great Mind / Create, creator and receiver both" (254-6, my emphasis): like connotes a mind that is similar to the great mind but not the same as.<sup>33</sup> The editors of the Norton

edition note that Wordsworth's revisions result in "a more credible baby, but a weakened statement of Wordsworth's intuition of strength drawn from the child-mother relationship" (N2 81). I think they view the later characterization as credible because it offers a more familiar, traditional view of the mother as an object from which to draw strength instead of a subject with which to identify; in the 1850 view Wordsworth also stresses the significance of Nature as a source of poetic power at the expense of the mother. On the contrary, I believe the 1805 edition offers the more "credible" view because it emphasizes the mutuality and difference involved in the mother-child and Nature-child relationships instead of valuing difference more than mutuality.

Despite the reduction of the mother's significance in 1850, in both editions Wordsworth notes the cooperative "alliance" between child and mother, or child and Nature that symbolizes mother. This "alliance" points to a balance between the child's creative and receptive faculties. It marks the equal importance of internal and external worlds instead of positing a position of dominance of one over the other.

Finally, Wordsworth concludes all three versions of this section with a coda in an almost identical fashion:

Such, verily, is the first  
Poetic spirit of our human life,  
By uniform controul of after years,  
In most, abated and suppressed; in some,  
Through every change of growth and of decay

Pre-eminent till death. (1805.275-80)

In all three versions Wordsworth points to the infant mind's tendency towards noticing connectedness, and its resulting combination of all external objects together. This act of combination, Wordsworth says, is at the base of the adult poetic spirit. Or, more precisely, it is paradoxically the simultaneous noticing of sameness and difference which is at the root of poetic power and which enables the child to begin to see the relationship between self and other.<sup>34</sup>

However, in 1799 and 1805 Wordsworth more closely links this power to the relationship with the mother than he does in 1850. Wordsworth reduces the significance of the filial bond in the later edition even though traces of the mother's significance remain in the text. Like Kristeva, he says that most people suppress the poetic spirit; as she says almost two hundred years after Wordsworth, "Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relations to the mother [the semiotic]." On the other hand, the poetic spirit is nurtured in some: "the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language . . . maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element" (136).<sup>35</sup> While the semiotic component (i.e., tone and rhythm) is manifested extensively in poetic language by definition, for Wordsworth to point explicitly to the mother as the origin of this activity dangerously foregrounds the transgressive and incestuous associations of the semiotic.



Further, to acknowledge the significance of the child's relationship with the mother as a source of poetic power presents the poet as dependent on her. With his own revisions, Wordsworth seems to demonstrate an unconscious repression of the source of the semiotic which he displaces by safely substituting Nature into the mother's position, and he thus makes himself the independent, masculinized poet and "great man."<sup>36</sup>

My comparison of the three versions of the blessed babe section reveals a move on Wordsworth's part to reduce the significance of the mother as she relates to the child's introduction to poetic powers even though in all of the versions Wordsworth points to the filial relationship as having some significance. When the speaker of 1850 does recognize the mother, he tends to objectify her and focus on the maternal body as object from which to draw strength and power instead of a subject with which to identify. In 1805, the child does not clearly perceive the mother as recognizing him as a subject, but he does conceptualize her as a being with an "earthly soul" with whom he can claim "manifest kindred." Even though he does not make the intersubjective leap of representing the mother as a subject by whom the child feels recognized in 1805, the child's view of the mother as a subject gives more credence to Wordsworth's conception of Nature as a sort of subject which he substitutes for the mother in rest of book two.<sup>37</sup>

### **Difference, Symbolic Activity, and the Mother**

In both the 1805 and 1850 editions of the next section of book two, Wordsworth represents a shift from the child's balance of separation from and connection with the mother to the child's greater feeling of separation and difference which Wordsworth associates with a mothering Nature. However, in 1850 the poet marks the separation more extremely than in 1805: in 1805, he maintains the importance of connection in light of separation. In both versions, the greater awareness of self also signals the child's initiation into symbolic activity, yet Wordsworth does not conceptualize this shift as resulting from the entrance of a father figure (as in the Lacanian account), but instead views it in light of the child's relationship with the mother and personified Nature. However, Wordsworth figures personified Nature more as a subject in 1805 and as more of an object in 1850. Consequently, Wordsworth figures himself as more connected to and dependent on the mother and Nature in 1805 than in 1850, and his later revision, once again, seems to function to assuage the anxiety of associating his poetics with the mother and mothering Nature.

Wordsworth begins the section by reminding readers of what he has previously described in the blessed babe section. There, he spoke of the babe in the third person, but here he makes clear with the first-person pronoun, I, that he has been speaking about himself:

From early days,  
Beginning not long after that first time  
In which, a babe, by intercourse of touch  
I held mute dialogues with my mother's heart,  
I have endeavoured to display the means  
Whereby the infant sensibility,  
Great birthright of our being, was in me  
Augmented and sustained. (1805.280-87)

He derived the "infant sensibility," the poetic spirit, from his predominantly semiotic connection with his mother, a relation of "mute dialogues" sustained "by intercourse of touch." Next, he describes a new state of being in which difference is more pronounced:

Yet is a path  
More difficult before me, and I fear  
That in its broken windings we shall need  
The chamois' sinews, and the eagle's wing.  
For now a trouble came into my mind  
From unknown causes. I was left alone  
Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.  
The props of my affections were removed,  
And yet the building stood, as if sustained  
By its own spirit. All that I beheld  
Was dear to me, and from this cause it came  
That now to Nature's finer influxes  
My mind lay open--to that more exact  
And intimate communion. . . . (1805.287-300)

This moment marks a shift in emphasis from connection to separation. Wordsworth recalls feeling "alone" (he can distinguish between solitude and community) and remarks that even though the "props of [his] affections were removed . . . the building stood": he can and does exist independently of his mother.

Using a Lacanian framework, Margaret Homans argues in her influential book Bearing the Word that with this shift in emphasis from connection to separation Wordsworth repeats the dominant myth of symbolic language acquisition: "the

boy's postoeidial renunciation of the mother and his quest for substitute objects of desire." She concludes that language "as a structure of difference and absence . . . is modeled on sexual difference, the boy's difference from and renunciation of his mother" (41). With help from Thomas Weiskel's The Romantic Sublime, Homans argues further that Wordsworth only partially renounces the mother, but ambivalently attempts to re-merge with her and the semiotic by resisting separation from objects: he resists making the object absent, a necessary requirement for using verbal language.<sup>38</sup> In psychoanalytic terms, he splits the mother into "part-objects" and introjects the semiotic activity which she represents in order to resist the separation from objects.

Homans's reading is accurate in that Wordsworth does acquire language in this moment through his relationship with the mother, but, uncharacteristically, her reading is problematic in that she neglects to point out a significant discrepancy between the Lacanian model (which she uses to interpret The Prelude) and Wordsworth's actual account of language acquisition. In Lacan's account a phallic father introduces the difference, but Wordsworth's account lacks such a phallic figure. Homans's primary objective is to show how Wordsworth's account demonstrates the male's substitution of symbolic language for the mother in order to satisfy desire; however, she seems to skip a step in her explanation of how Wordsworth becomes aware of difference

because of a phallic father. Wordsworth conceptualizes language acquisition entirely in terms of the child's separation from and connection with the mother, and no father is present.

Wordsworth initially communicates "by intercourse of touch" and through "mute dialogues" with the mother which connote tangible, unstable semiotic activity. Yet Wordsworth says "unknown causes" lead to the "trouble" or anxiety "which came into [his] mind" and lead him to seek "the visible world" and lay his mind open to "that more exact and intimate communion" (symbolic activity). Homans simply says, "The trouble is the acquisition of language; it is also the death of Wordsworth's mother when he was eight years old" (3-4).<sup>39</sup> She is careful to note that the death is not simply Ann Cookson Wordsworth's actual death in 1778 (as Richard Onorato supposes), but that Wordsworth connects his mother's actual death and the resulting feeling of loss with the acquisition of symbolic language.<sup>40</sup> However, Homans neglects to point out that Wordsworth's actual father, Richard Wordsworth, or some other paternal figure does not figure into this scheme. To remain consistent with the Lacanian Father, it seems likely that Richard, as bearer of the phallus, or another third term would somehow be connected to "the trouble" that leads William to enter the symbolic order. Without this third term the Wordsworthian paradigm of verbal language acquisition does not quite fit the Lacanian/Freudian model, as Homans supposes.

However, the most troubling moment in Homans' analysis is the way she conflates cause with effect in her reading of this passage. She says that the loss the child experiences "feels like the mother's death, and it is, paradoxically, both caused by and the cause of the acquisition of representational language" (4). However, within the syntax of the poem, the speaker says that the trouble or feeling of loss ("this cause") leads to ("from this cause it came that") "communion" (1799, 1805) or "communication" (1850). Wordsworth actually implies more of a distinction between the feeling of loss and the symbolic activity of verbal language.

If the "loss" does not both cause and equal verbal language (as in Homans's account), but the loss instead leads to verbal language, what, specifically, is the actual loss? I believe, as Wordsworth clearly states, the cause is "unknown." His revision from 1799's obscure (2.322) to 1805's unknown (292) gives an even stronger connotation of uncertainty or unknowability in the later edition. In light of some of the psychoanalytic theories I have discussed previously, a child's feeling of loss may be originary, or result from birth trauma, cutting the umbilical cord, or being weaned from the breast. However, Wordsworth himself does not make clear what the cause might be; he simply says he feels troubled, or anxious, and that feeling leads him to notice the "transitory qualities," change or difference

(309). The what, or the distinction or relationship between what I have called semiotic and symbolic activity, connection and separation, is Wordsworth's primary interest, not the precise how, or the way one moves from a predominantly semiotic to symbolic state. The point of intersection that Wordsworth sees along this spectrum of semiotic/symbolic exchange is the mother. The child's relationship with the mother marks the shift from a semiotic emphasis to a more pronounced symbolic emphasis, or as Kristeva says,

At the same time instinctual and maternal, semiotic processes prepare the future speaker for entrance into meaning and signification (the symbolic). But the symbolic . . . constitutes itself only by breaking with this anteriority.  
(136)

For Wordsworth, the fact that anxiety leads to an awareness of difference seems unavoidable, but the precise cause, though somehow rooted in the child's relationships with the mother and Nature, is, very explicitly, unknowable.

From another complementary perspective, this moment of loss serves as a representation of what D.W. Winnicott calls destruction, or an effort to differentiate self from other in which the child destroys the other internally--"the loss" that Homans says "feels like the mother's death"--in order to know that the other (mother and Nature) is not simply an object under the child's control.<sup>41</sup> However, in destruction, the other must survive; the child must open his eyes and see that the other still exists. When the child acts upon the

other, the other must be affected so that the child knows he himself exists. Wordsworth says, "I was left alone / seeking the visible world," thus distinguishing between self and other. In addition, the other must not be completely destroyed, so that the child knows the other actually exists apart from him: "to Nature's finer influxes / My mind lay open"; he seems aware that he can act on Nature, and Nature can act on him. Again, for Wordsworth, separation is not the only issue in language acquisition and identity development, but the relationship with the other is also important.<sup>42</sup> He does not simply destroy or murder the other in order to recreate it in symbolic activity, but he also maintains an awareness of connection with the other in reality.

However, Wordsworth values connection differently in 1805 than in 1850: the 1805 characterization emphasizes the child and Nature as co-participants in the relationship more than the 1850. In 1805 Wordsworth writes,

to Nature's finer influxes  
My mind lay open--to that more exact  
And intimate communion which our hearts  
Maintain with the minuter properties  
Of objects which already are beloved  
And of those only. (1805.298-303).

However, in 1850, he writes,

hence to finer influxes  
The mind lay open to a more exact  
And close communication. (1850.282-284)

When he refers to the interaction with Nature as "intimate communion" in 1805 (300), he stresses the action of "being with" a personified Nature, while at the same time holding onto a feeling of



separation ("my mind lay open"). However, in 1850 he describes this relationship as "close communication" (284), he deletes the passage that describes it, and he does not directly refer to the "communication" as occurring with Nature. Communion denotes more of a spiritual interchange between two parties while communication may simply denote reception of "All that I beheld" (1850.281). Further, Wordsworth does not specify in 1850 that "my mind lay open" but that "the mind lay open" (my emphasis): the possessive pronoun of 1805 marks the separation between personified Nature and the mind more personally. Wordsworth's description of the objects of Nature as "beloved" also brings an affective quality to the relationship, one usually reserved for people, but here applied to objects. Thus, in the 1805 version, Wordsworth views Nature more like a subject and in the 1850 more like an object.

\* \* \*

Consequently, in neither the 1805 or the 1850 version does Wordsworth offer a paradigm that fits the traditional, Oedipal model, as critics such as Homans and Onorato suggest. He attributes the use of semiotic activity to the mother, but he also attributes the use of symbolic activity to his relationship with her. The entrance of a paternal third term does not lead the child to become more aware of separation, but the child gradually becomes more aware of difference in relation to the mother and a personified Nature. With his view of Nature as a sort of subject with which to have "intimate communion," separation is not the only issue important for the poetic spirit, but connection with the other also remains important; in 1805 he views that connection as being with Nature as a sort of subject, but in 1850 Nature is more of an object. Indeed, as I will further

illustrate in the next section, connection is an essential part of the poetic spirit for Wordsworth.

**Creator and Receiver Both: Difference, Recognition,  
and the Transitional Realm**

In the next section of book two, Wordsworth displays how the creative and receptive powers of the imagination function together to constitute the poetic spirit. He conceptualizes Nature as a pseudo-subject with which he can form an alliance in order to enter an imaginative realm which is conducive to poetry-making, but in fact, Nature is more of an object which he can control. At the beginning of this section he explores the ability to note difference that a more pronounced use of the symbolic has offered him:

Many are our joys  
In youth, but oh! what happiness to live  
When every hour brings palpable access  
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,  
And sorrow is not there. The seasons came,  
And every season to my notice brought  
A store of transitory qualities,  
Which, but for this most watchful power of love,  
Had been neglected, left a register  
Of permanent relations, else unknown.  
(1805.303-313)

Here Wordsworth recalls reveling in the change of seasons. In youth, he associates no sorrow with impermanence or separation. The thing that enables him to notice difference more self-consciously, "this watchful power of love," is difficult to identify, especially in the 1805 version, because the section is distanced on the page by a large space and an indentation from the "From early days" section.<sup>43</sup> However, the typographical connection on the page of this

section to the "From early days passage" in the 1850 version more precisely suggests that the "watchful power" is at one level the bond with the mother which he had previously said causes the "discipline of love" (1805.251). The awareness of difference leaves a mark on the child so that he becomes aware of the relations among the seasons. Wordsworth stresses the importance of both separateness and relatedness in recalling the time when he had this new found knowledge. Without the knowledge of difference, the child could not have the knowledge of relatedness, the "permanent relations" he sees.

Wordsworth continues,

Hence, life, and change, and beauty, solitude  
 More active even than 'best society'--  
 Society made sweet as solitude  
 By silent, inobtrusive sympathies  
 And gentle agitations of the mind  
 From manifold distinctions, difference  
 Perceived in things, where, to the common eye,  
 No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
 Sublimer joy. (1805.313-321)

The syntax of this extended catalogue is terribly confusing because Wordsworth juxtaposes seeming opposites (i.e., solitude and society, gentle agitations) to express a very complicated idea and because of the awkward punctuation he uses to mark parenthetical ideas (i.e., the explanation of 'best society'). Because of the more pronounced awareness of difference (the transitory qualities and change of seasons) the child enters a more dynamic state. Instead of the static but highly charged early bond with the mother in which little difference is perceived, a more prominent

awareness of difference allows "him" to have an "intimate communion" (1805.300) or "close[r] communication" (1850.284) with the external world. The feeling of difference he experiences in this moment of subjective sharing actually creates a feeling of reality. In Benjamin's words, the feeling of difference gives the experience "a degree of imperfection [which] 'ratifies' the existence of the world" (47). In Wordsworth's extended catalogue of how the child gains greater awareness of "his" relationship with the external world, the child becomes aware of life, change, and beauty. The child becomes aware of solitude because previously he did not differentiate clearly between solitude and society. The child experiences the gentle agitations of the mind which he previously neglected because he had a "common" (1805) or "unwatchful eye" (1850.300). "That same source" is "the trouble" or the simultaneous bond/break with the mother ("the watchful power of love"), and it leads to Wordsworth's summarization of the six attributes of knowledge acquisition and "sublimar joy." Now the child must more actively try to bridge the gap between the differences of things in order to create a bond with Nature similar to the one he experienced with the mother, to discover that both Nature and mother actually, concretely, exist.

In the next section, Wordsworth represents what he has previously expressed abstractly about bridging the gap

between himself and Nature in concrete, natural terms with a specific example:

For I would walk alone,  
In storm or tempest, or in starlight nights  
Beneath the quiet heavens, and at that time  
Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
To breathe an elevated mood, by form  
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are  
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.  
(1805.321-29)

In the "society made sweet as solitude," which here the maturing boy forms more directly with Nature after his period of infancy with his mother, Wordsworth focuses on the language that Nature speaks to him. Nature does not speak words, but speaks sounds which create moods "by form or image unprofaned." He remembers hearing the "notes that are / The ghostly language of the ancient earth." Just as in the bond with the mother, Wordsworth joins with Nature in an affective and not intellectual way. And even while noticing difference, the child also perceives the sounds and articulations of Nature as semiotic (non-representational sounds with an "uncertain and indeterminate articulation" [Kristeva 133]). Despite its ghostliness or formlessness, Wordsworth hears a message from Nature, a message which leads him to "drink" (with the recurring breast image) visionary status, intense as any Keats experienced:

There did I drink the visionary power.  
I deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
That they are kindred to our purer mind  
And intellectual life; but that the soul--  
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt

Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity, to which  
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
 With faculties still growing, feeling still  
 That whatsoever point they gain they still  
 Have something to pursue. (1805.330-41)

Wordsworth values the fleeting moods that Nature's ghostly language brings him not because they access a more refined, cerebral life, but because they access an "obscure sense / Of possible sublimity" which the soul retains from the early experience with the mother. Even though the soul's faculties continue to grow, they never reach a point of satisfaction (of actually attaining a limit); the soul's strivings have an endlessness which Wordsworth stresses with the repetition of the adverb still.<sup>44</sup> Just as in the state Kristeva describes in which the semiotic predominates, there is no fixed limit (the speaker "retains an obscure sense"). Just as in the state in which the semiotic predominates, this state "is definitely heterogeneous [discordant] to meaning but always in sight of it" (Kristeva 133).<sup>45</sup> The sublime moments with Nature depend on a sense of emergent organization in the child's relationship to Nature; they depend on the infinitely "growing faculties" he uses to position himself with Nature.

In the next passage, Wordsworth continues to specify the maturing bond between himself as a young boy and Nature. The way he describes the connection illustrates the relationship between receptive and creative powers of the imagination, the separating and unifying powers. He

describes his venturing out into Nature as a young boy and how these journeys affected him:

Nor seldom did I lift our cottage latch  
 Far earlier, and ere one smoke-wreath had risen  
 From human dwelling, or the thrush, high perched,  
 Piped to the woods his shrill reveillé, sate  
 Alone upon some jutting eminence,  
 At the first gleam of dawn-light, when the Vale,  
 Yet slumbering, lay in utter solitude.  
 How shall I seek the origin? where find  
 Faith in the marvellous things which then I felt?  
 Oft in these moments such a holy calm  
 Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes  
 Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw  
 Appeared like something in myself, a dream,  
 A prospect in the mind. (1850.339-52)<sup>46</sup>

Wordsworth seems to be describing the beauty of an early morning scene in Nature, but the individual objects he describes hold much more significance than that. The "one smoke-wreath," the "thrush" that is "alone," the "first gleam" of sunlight, and the vale in "utter solitude" are all just like the boy: they are alone in themselves, but connected to the greater scene. That Wordsworth isolates these objects which are so similar to himself and then questions the origin of their beauty is no coincidence. He acknowledges that viewing these objects as a part of the landscape gives him a peacefulness, "a holy calm," but then explains that "bodily eyes / Were utterly forgotten." The distance between observer (with "bodily eyes") and observed is temporarily bridged; the young Wordsworth almost seems to merge himself with the natural landscape. The position of the external objects as different from himself ceases to be significant. They are less separate from him; he says, they

are "like something in myself, a dream": he incorporates them into himself, but recognizes their difference.

In psychoanalytic terms, Wordsworth represents a moment similar to recognition, the "response from the other which makes" the self's "feelings, intentions, and actions" meaningful. Recognition "allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way"; however, "such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right" (Benjamin 12). Recognition "assumes that we are able and need to recognize that other subject as different and yet alike, as an other who is capable of sharing similar mental experience" (Benjamin 20). Certainly, Nature is not a person, but the speaker's substitution of Nature into the mother's position, his repeated personification of her, and the give and take "communing" relationship he establishes with Nature all suggest that Wordsworth conceptualizes Nature as like another subject. He recognizes that the reason the objects in Nature are so beautiful is that they are like him, alone, yet still connected to the landscape. Even though the relationship between Nature as other and Wordsworth cannot be reflexive (Nature is not a subject and cannot actually respond to him the way that he responds to it), he perceives the relationship as being reflexive: "it includes not only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response. We recognize



ourselves in the other, and we even recognize ourselves in inanimate things" (Benjamin 21), i.e., the smoke-wreath and the thrush. Conceptualizing his relationship with Nature as reflexive allows Wordsworth to perceive an equal alliance with Nature just as he has discerned the relationship with the mother as an alliance through "mute dialogues" and "by intercourse of touch" (1805.282-83).

Because of this reflexive attitude toward Nature, Wordsworth's early-morning observation of Nature becomes an example of the poetic spirit which he discussed in the blessed babe section. His mind "Creates, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds" (1805. 272-275). He is "drinking" in the natural scene which he views as separate, but he is also organizing it--selecting, remembering, arranging, and describing the objects so that they become most like him: the "one smoke-wreath," the "thrush" that is "alone," the "first gleam" of sunlight, and the vale in "utter solitude" are all just like the boy.<sup>47</sup> Both the symbolic and semiotic are at work; he sees the difference of the landscape, but then identifies himself with it and gains pleasure, just as children gain pleasure when they simultaneously identify with and differentiate themselves from the mother.<sup>48</sup> The speaker is in what Winnicott has called a "transitional realm," a state of mind "in which the child can play and create as if the outside were as malleable as his own fantasy" (Benjamin 41).<sup>49</sup> Benjamin says that this early

transitional experience "forms a continuum with the most developed capacities for contemplation and creativity, for discovering the outside as an object existing in its own right" (42). Wordsworth does not recall a transitional realm as such, but he does describe a realm which his original experience in the transitional realm with his mother helps to foster. His perception of the sublime alliance with Nature is built on the alliance with the mother.

Wordsworth continues to present the relationship between the receptive and creative facets of the imagination; however, in the next verse paragraph he more consciously focuses on the creative facet. Continuing his use of the breast metaphor he says that it would take a very long time to catalogue the many seasons which "poured forth to feed" (1850) or more explicitly "nurse" (1805) the feeling of "religious love" in which he "walked with Nature" (1805.375-77/1850.357-58).<sup>50</sup> He says,

I still retained  
My first creative sensibility,  
That by the regular action of the world  
My soul was unsubdued. A plastic power  
Abode with me a forming hand, at times  
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,  
A local spirit of its own, at war  
With general tendency, but for the most,  
Subservient strictly to external things  
With which it communed. An auxiliar light  
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun  
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,  
The fluttering breezes, fountains that ran on  
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed  
A like dominion, and the midnight storm  
Grew darker in the presence of my eye.  
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,

And hence my transport. (1805.378-395)

Wordsworth recalls that he did not simply submit to Nature, but that he shaped it as well because he has the power of both receiver and creator. Paradoxically the "plastic power," or "auxiliar light," is subservient to the external world, but at the same time the power communes with Nature because they are similar capacities.<sup>51</sup> Even though Wordsworth relies on the language of domination with authoritative words like rebellious, war, dominion, and obeisance, the phenomenon he describes is more like an identification or mutual recognition--"emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind" (Benjamin 16)--than domination of his spirit by Nature or Nature by his spirit. He conceptualizes Nature as like another subject even though it cannot be one. In mutual recognition the child/person has a need "to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct . . . . the child has a need to see the mother, too, as an independent subject, not simply as the 'external world' or an adjunct of his ego" (Benjamin 23). The fact that the light that comes from the poet's mind is "auxiliar" or supplementary suggests this recognition--just as real sunlight projects the images of Nature through his eyes and into his mind, the plastic power, the corresponding internal light of his mind, imposes a "like dominion" on the images of Nature. He seems to say, "I agree to be ruled by you because you are like me and agree to be ruled by me." In

actuality, the phenomenon that probably occurs is, "I agree to be ruled by you because I have imaginatively made you like me." He represents a moment similar to mutual recognition in the child's ecstatic bond of filial love with the mother "when his soul / Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul" (1805.241-2), hence his "transport." In the instance with Nature, connecting with external reality is a source of pleasure and not just a constraint to regressive narcissism, of losing a sense of the other (Nature or the mother) as separate: experiencing external Nature not only allows him to check the difference of his internal reality with external reality, but it also allows him to experience pleasure in the similarity of internal and external reality without merging his identity with Nature's.

Wordsworth emphasizes the creative, synthesizing power of his mind in the next verse paragraph. The previous passage makes him appear a simple wanderer in the wilderness, but the following lines stress a more active creativity:

Nor should this, perchance,  
 Pass unrecorded, that I still had loved  
 The exercise and produce of a toil,  
 Than analytic industry to me  
 More pleasing, and whose character I deem  
 Is more poetic, as resembling more  
 Creative agency. I mean to speak  
 Of that interminable building reared  
 By observation of affinities  
 In objects where no brotherhood exists  
 To common minds. (1805.395-405)

Here he contrasts the types of mental activity that he described to Coleridge in the opening of book two--"that

false secondary power," science, "by which we multiply distinctions" and which Kristeva tells us is primarily symbolic; and the synthetic power to see "the unity of all."<sup>52</sup> A key characteristic of poetic power is in observing "affinities / In objects where no brotherhood exists / To common minds" (passive minds in 1850) which contrasts the separating, dividing effects of "analytic industry."<sup>53</sup>

He continues to show the balance of creativity and receptivity he previously described and indicates that he kept this power up to his seventeenth year. He offers two alternatives for why he continues to revel in the pleasure of connecting with Nature which enables him to "see blessings spread around me like a sea" (1805.414). He gets pleasure from the "inorganic objects" of Nature not because he "Coerc[es] all things into sympathy" of his "own enjoyments"; but because he "converse[s] / With things that really are" (1805.2.410-414). Yet again, he discounts the dominating, coercive option as he associates the "power of truth" with the conversations, the connection. So here again he describes a sort of mutual recognition in which the speaker both gives (creates) and receives in his conversation with Nature. This pseudo-recognition is similar to the one in which the child gathers passion from his mother's eye, or looks into the mother's eye and sees her but also sees himself. Nature is not such a person/subject, but he perceives "her" as such. This perspective on Nature allows him, even at seventeen, to re-

enter the transitional realm, or recreate a realm similar to it. This is the power of the poetic spirit.

Finally, Wordsworth further describes his perceived mutual recognition with Nature when he says he is only contented

when with bliss ineffable  
I felt the sentiment of Being spread  
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still,  
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought  
And human knowledge, to the human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart. (1805.419-24)

The connection he describes is beyond the intellectual, the "analytic industry" (398), and is, in the same manner he has described poetic power, affective and synthetic. The verb lost is an especially evocative word in terms of the mother in that it evokes the lost relation the child had with the mother, the invisible, unconscious knowledge associated with the semiotic.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Wordsworth seems to want to recreate that condition in which difference is minimal, when everything exists in a more unified state as he continues to build an all-encompassing catalogue. The "sentiment of Being" spreads

O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and  
sings,  
Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides  
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,  
And mighty depth of waters. (1805.2.425-28)

His list includes beasts of land, air, and sea, but the phrase "in the wave itself" captures the motion, the rhythm of the passage that the repetitions of "O'er all that" make tangible. With audible, verbal language he strives to push

forward the semiotic component of poetic language, the rhythm of "the wave."

Even though he seems to want to submerge into an "oceanic" feeling of infantile merger, "a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded" which Freud describes in Civilization and Its Discontents, (64-65, 72) the self is still not subsumed by Nature; the self remains "unsubdued" (301):

One song they sang, and it was audible--  
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,  
O'ercome by the grosser prelude of that strain,  
Forgot her functions and slept undisturbed.  
(1805.431-34).<sup>55</sup>

The child/person hears "one song," but he is aware that "they," the multiple beasts of Nature, sang it. The "fleshly ear," the receptive part of the "poetic power" sleeps and gives over to the creative power, but the receptive imagination does not completely cease to function; the ear merely "forgets" her functions, or operates unconsciously.

Because the child/person is not overwhelmed by Nature's song and does not merge completely with Nature, this song that sweeps over all is similar to the song Benjamin says a mother might sing to her child when she "mix[es] novelty with repetition" instead of cooing "in a constant rhythm."

This mother's song causes the baby to

focus longer on her face and show pleasure in return. The combination of resonance and difference that the mother offers can open the way to a recognition that transcends mastery and

mechanical response, to a recognition that is based on mutuality. (26)

There is a point of contact between speaker as subject and Nature as pseudo-subject (a representation of the mother) as the speaker reenters or recreates the feeling of the transitional realm.

\* \* \*

Wordsworth's poetic spirit relies on a simultaneous balance between identification and differentiation, a dynamic of recognition. In 1805, Wordsworth initially views this balance as coming from the child's early relationship with the mother as a subject in the transitional realm and eventually developed through a similar relationship with Nature in another sort of transitional realm. He conceptualizes Nature as a pseudo-subject with which he can have an alliance, but in fact, Nature functions as more of an object which he controls. The revisions from 1805 to 1850 reduce the significance of the filial bond because they tend to objectify both the mother and Nature. Consequently, the child's poetic spirit is represented as more mysteriously innate in 1850. One explanation, as Kristeva might argue, is that writing poetry or overtly engaging in the semiotic is committing a dangerous sort of incest. So for Wordsworth, to acknowledge poetry overtly as a reconnection with the mother points too closely to an incestuous merger with the mother--"a union that cannot be" which expresses the "eagerness of infantine desire"



(1850.2.24, 26). More practically, retaining the maternal bond could mean that Wordsworth does not become an independent subject/poet. To mystify his poetic spirit partially and link it more explicitly to a bond with Nature is much safer than connecting it to a bond which can potentially be perceived as too dependent. The actual reason why he represses the mother's significance is unknowable, but it is clear that Wordsworth does not describe the maternal source of power so clearly in 1850 as he does in 1805. The fact that in 1805 Wordsworth does mark the matrix makes it an essential text through which to explore Wordsworth's attitudes about women and his understanding of the poetic spirit. We can read the early Wordsworth not simply as a completely individuated, solitary figure, but a poet who also values connection.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> My primary text is the Norton edition of The Prelude edited by Jonathan Wordsworth, M. H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill. Generally, I quote from the 1805 edition; however, since the distinction between versions is so central to my argument, when the edition to which I refer may be confusing I note the date of the text parenthetically. Since this is an autobiographical poem, I refer to the speaker as "Wordsworth" although I recognize the distinction between Wordsworth as poet and Wordsworth as speaker.

<sup>2</sup> Although William Cowper's The Task (1785) certainly influenced Wordsworth's writing of The Prelude, I am not punning on Wordsworth's use of the word task in this instance.

<sup>3</sup> I use the masculine pronoun because the blessed babe is very decidedly a boy in Wordsworth's account (later in the section it becomes clear that Wordsworth is talking about himself).

<sup>4</sup> Throughout my discussion of the 1850 edition of The Prelude, which is based on Wordsworth's final revisions in 1839, my style may seem to indicate that Wordsworth made changes in 1850. I refer to the document as the 1850 because that was when his executors published it.

<sup>5</sup> Until very recently, the 1850 edition has been the most frequently anthologized version of The Prelude: The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Auden and Pearson's The Portable Romantic Poets, and Perkins's English Romantic Writers all use or excerpt from the 1850. Wu includes the 1805 in his recent Romanticism: An Anthology and Mellor and Matlak's use selections from both 1805 and 1850 in their recent British Literature, 1780-1830.

<sup>6</sup> My discussions of Lacan and Kristeva are based primarily on his Écrits: A Selection (especially "The Mirror Stage" and "The Signification of the Phallus"), Kristeva's Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art (especially, "From One Identity to Another"), Eagleton's discussion in "Psychoanalysis" in Literary Theory: An Introduction, Margaret Homans' introduction in Bearing the Word, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges' From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother, and John Muller and William Richardson's Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits. For more on the object relations perspective, Nancy Chodorow offers a lucid summary in The Reproduction of Mothering with references to Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott. For a clear account of the ego psychology view see Margaret Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman's The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant.

Lacan's system assumes the child is male. I will discuss problems of this assumption as the chapter progresses.

<sup>7</sup> Freud stresses that the pre-Oedipal period is a narcissistic time of primary identification in which children do not differentiate themselves from their environment or those around them: "it is a direct and immediate identification and takes place earlier than any object cathexis" (The Ego and the Id 31). Freud describes this moment as an "oceanic feeling" in Civilization and its Discontents (64-95, 72). Mahler refers to this feeling as the sybiotic phase (43-51).

<sup>8</sup> Mahler refers to this phenomena as differentiation (52-64). She says it begins to occur at around the age of 4-5 months while Lacan similarly maintains that it occurs around age 6 months (1).

<sup>9</sup> In line with the Freudian account, the Lacanian phallus marks sexual difference which leads to an awareness of difference in general. See Lacan's *Écrits*, "The Signification of the Phallus" and Eagleton (165-66).

<sup>10</sup> Chodorow also sees the father's importance (she includes siblings as well) at this early age, but she does not view him to be as significant as does Lacan:

Father and siblings--or other important people in the caretaker's life who are perceived as coming between caretaker and infant, but do not do primary caretaking themselves--are in some ways more easily differentiated from the self, because the infant's first association with them involves envy and a perception of self in opposition. . . . Because [the father] is so involved with the child's mother, his role in the child's later defensive identifications--identification with his power or closeness to the child's mother, for instance--is also crucial. . . . The father also enables more firm differentiation of objects. The infant, as it struggles out of primary identification, is less able to compare itself and its mother, than to compare mother and father, or mother and other important people she relates to. (*Reproduction* 70-71)

<sup>11</sup> The entry into the symbolic order is essentially a reading of Freud's Oedipus Complex.

<sup>12</sup> Mahler calls this phase rapprochement (76-108), which is the period following differentiation and practicing (including body differentiation from the mother, establishment of a bond with her, and the beginning growth of a separate ego in proximity to her (65-65-75)). Rapprochement is "a period of struggle in which the child begins "to reconcile his grandiose aspiration and euphoria with the perceived reality of his limitation and dependency" (Benjamin 34). Mahler also notes that verbal language and other types of communication begin to become more prominent during this phase (77).

Object relations theorists continue the progression speculating that children eventually reach a symbiotic relationship with the mother in which they "oscillate between perceptions of [their] mother as separate and as not separate" (Chodorow 62), and then they experience primary love (an object cathexis to the mother) before moving into the Oedipal phase. This display of desire in primary love seems like a way that a child expresses or begins to express an awareness of difference.

<sup>13</sup> Of course this is an oversimplification of very complex developmental stages. One problem with the Lacanian system is that it assumes a boy-child and places special emphasis on the Oedipal phase.

Margaret Homans revises Lacan's theory so that it may account for girls' experience as well. When the daughter discovers that "she is the same as her mother and different from her father. . . her relationship to her mother contradicts, rather than reinforces (as in the case of the son), the dependence of the symbolic order on the absence of the mother" (11). The Law of the Father prohibits incest with the threat of castration and offers entry into the symbolic order as a reward. Since the daughter does not experience difference in the same way as the son (she lacks the lack), Lacanian desire is not experienced the same way either. Homans quotes Nancy Chodorow who argues that "a mother experiences 'a daughter as an extension or double of . . . herself, with cathexis of the daughter as a sexual other usually remaining a weaker, less significant theme'" (11). Since the mother is similar, the daughter does not need a phallus to make the connection with her. Without this desire for the phallus, the daughter "does not enter the symbolic order as wholeheartedly or as exclusively as does the son" (12). Homans' revision is troubling in that language acquisition, even for a daughter, must come through noticing difference from the father. However, there are ways to view difference as occurring before an Oedipal phase, in the child's early relationship with the mother.

<sup>14</sup> See Rank's The Trauma of Birth, especially chapter two, "Infantile Anxiety" (11-29). Basing his work on his mentor Freud's, he argues that "all anxiety goes back originally to the anxiety at birth" (11).

<sup>15</sup> See also Klein's "Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms" in The Selected Melanie Klein.

<sup>16</sup> This idea of dynamic as opposed to static identity parallels one that Stanton sees in the work of Kristeva: Kristeva "strives to undermine identity in favor of a subject always in process, on trial or what she calls 'a process without subject'" (161, my emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Stern argues that an infant begins to have an "emergent sense of self and other" from age 0-2 months, but believes that infants do not have a sense of a "core self and other" as separate physical entities until between the ages of 2-6 months (Interpersonal 26-28). For Stern, the critical issue becomes not when an awareness of separateness fully emerges, but how the infant's awareness of separateness and connectedness manifests at different developmental phases.

<sup>18</sup> Mahler's theory of separation-individuation in ego-psychology also views individuation as a linear movement of oneness to separateness instead of viewing the dynamic balance of these two poles.

<sup>19</sup> My overview of intersubjective theory comes mostly from "The First Bond," chapter 1 of The Bonds of Love (especially 20-26). My discussion is also informed by Daniel Stern's The Interpersonal World of the Infant.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin lists near synonyms of recognition: to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathize, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with, find familiar, . . . love" (15-16).

<sup>21</sup> Homans reads the Lacanian group (of which Kristeva is a part) as saying that the child "leaves behind the communication system he shares with his mother" (7) and says that Kristeva characterizes the relationship between mother and child as one that should be fled and "as being dangerous to adult sanity" (19). However, I think Homans' reading of Kristeva is too extreme and a bit confused by not distinguishing clearly between activity and language. While Kristeva does say that semiotic activity is manifest in psychotic discourse in which "symbolic legality is wiped out in favor of arbitrariness of instinctual drive without meaning and communication," she is characterizing a "borderline experience" (139); she is using an extreme case to demonstrate how a language with an overbalance of the semiotic function exists. Doane and Hodges concur that Kristeva shows interest in psychosis "because it seems to provide access to this archaic and unexplored realm [the semiotic]" (60). Certainly, the borderline experience is "dangerous for the subject" (140), but she does not limit her discussion to one extreme of the spectrum between semiotic and symbolic. She also points to a language, in contrast, in which the symbolic function exists in an excessive overbalance, in which "transcendental mastery over discourse is possible" through "transcendental symbolics," in which signifier = sign (140).

<sup>22</sup> The notion of jouissance, or play, will become more significant and be developed later in my argument. Benjamin's complementary notion of the "logic of paradox" and the need to "sustain the tension between contradictory forces" (221) will also become important.

<sup>23</sup> As a counterexample to poetic language, she mentions scientific discourse which "tends to reduce as much as possible the semiotic component"--scientific discourse aspires to be a symbolic metalanguage (134).

In poetic language "the semiotic is not only a constraint as is the symbolic, but it tends to gain the upper hand at the expense of the thetic and predicative constraints of the ego's judging consciousness" (134); the semiotic relates more closely to the unconscious. Consequently, Kristeva says that rhythmic constraints (semiotic) "can perform an organizing function that could go so far as to violate certain grammatical rules [symbolic] . . . and often neglect the importance of an ideatory message [symbolic]" (134). This idea sounds very similar to Wordsworth's comment in "The Preface" that "metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit" (1800.144) and which I will discuss more fully in chapter 3.

<sup>24</sup> But Kristeva's model for poetic language presents several problems as well. Her assumption (though qualified by if) that the prohibition of incest leads to the symbolic order which is "symbolic language and women as exchange objects" implies the traditional Freudian model of mother = female, father = male, and child = male. In this system, only the male father can prohibit incest with the mother and the mother which is to be substituted must be a female so that women become "exchange objects." In the previous discussion it became apparent that the anxiety which is brought about by difference and prohibition in the Lacanian model may also be brought about by relations with the mother--physical separation, weaning, or birth trauma. What if prohibition of incest is not necessarily imposed by a father (a third term), but may be imposed by a mother? Poetic language may still be viewed as incestuous with a return to this maternal territory, but the connotation of blame is not placed so squarely on the mother. In the Lacanian/Kristevan system, the mother seems culpable in the illicit relationship with the father watching voyeuristically from the side. In this revised system, the child/poet who hearkens back to the semiotic does so, perhaps, against the mother's will so that only the child is culpable.

But what if an even more radical step is taken? The Kristevan model also assumes that the mother is a woman, which makes sense given current (though slowly changing) cultural norms. However, what if we conceptualize the person, or even persons, occupying the maternal position, as potentially male? Why wouldn't, from within a psychoanalytic perspective at least, the child employ semiotic activity and enter into symbolic language just the same?

<sup>25</sup> Again, the mother does not have to be a woman. The person occupying the maternal, caregiving position could be a man.

<sup>26</sup>I include the 1805 and 1850 "blessed babe" sections of book two below in their entirety. Ideally, these sections would be printed side by side throughout my analysis in the body of the text; however, Louisiana State University's formatting requirements make this impossible. This is the 1805 edition:

Blessed the infant babe-- [236]  
 For with my best conjectures I would trace  
 The progress of our being--blest the babe  
 Nursed in his mother's arms, the babe who sleeps  
 Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul [240]  
 Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,  
 Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.  
 Such feelings pass into his torpid life  
 Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind, [245]  
 Even in the first trial of his powers,  
 Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine  
 In one appearance all the elements  
 And parts of the same object, else detached  
 And loth to coalesce. Thus day by day [250]  
 Subjected to the discipline of love,  
 His organs and recipient faculties  
 Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads,  
 Tenacious of the forms which it receives  
 In one beloved presence--nay and more, [255]  
 In that most apprehensive habitude  
 And those sensations which have been derived  
 From this beloved presence--there exists  
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
 All objects through all intercourse of sense. [260]  
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed;  
 Along his infant veins are interfused  
 The gravitation and the filial bond  
 Of Nature that connect him with the world.  
 Emphatically such a being lives, [265]  
 An inmate of this active universe.  
 From nature largely he receives, nor so  
 Is satisfied, but largely gives again;  
 For feeling has to him imparted strength,  
 And--powerful in all sentiments of grief, [270]  
 Of exultation, fear and joy-- his mind,  
 Even as an agent of the one great mind,  
 Creates, creator and receiver both,  
 Working but in alliance with the works  
 Which it beholds.--Such, verily, is the first [275]  
 Poetic spirit of our human life,  
 By uniform controul of after years,  
 In most, abated and suppressed; in some,  
 Through every change of growth and of decay  
 Pre-eminent till death. (1805, II.236-280)  
 From early days,

Beginning not long after that first time  
 In which, a babe, by intercourse of touch  
 I held mute dialogues with my mother's heart,  
 I have endeavored to display the means  
 Whereby the infant sensibility, [285]  
 Great birthright of our being, was in me  
 Augmented and sustained. Yet is a path  
 More difficult before me, and I fear  
 That in its broken windings we shall need  
 The chamois' sinews, and the eagle's wing: [290]  
 For now a trouble came into my mind  
 From unknown causes: I was left alone  
 Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.  
 The props of my affections were removed,  
 And yet the building stood, as if sustained [295]  
 By its own spirit! All that I beheld  
 Was dear to me, and from this cause it came  
 That now to Nature's finer influxes  
 My mind lay open-- to that more exact  
 And intimate communion which our hearts [300]  
 Maintain with the minuter properties  
 Of objects which already are beloved  
 And of those only.

Many are the joys  
 Of youth, but oh, what happiness to live  
 When every hour brings palpable access [305]  
 Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,  
 And sorrow is not there! The seasons came,  
 And every season to my notice brought  
 A store of transitory qualities,  
 Which, but for this most watchful power of love, [310]  
 Had been neglected, left a register  
 Of permanent relations else unknown.  
 Hence, life, and change, and beauty, solitude  
 More active even than 'best society'--  
 Society made sweet as solitude [315]  
 By silent, inobtrusive sympathies  
 And gentle agitations of the mind  
 From manifold distinctions, difference  
 Perceived in things, where, to the common eye,  
 No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
 [320]  
 Sublimed joy. For I would walk alone,  
 In storm or tempest, or in starlight nights  
 Beneath the quiet heavens, and at that time  
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form [325]  
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are  
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.



There did I drink the visionary power. [330]  
 I deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
 That they [moods?] are kindred to our purer mind  
 And intellectual life; but that the soul--  
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt [335]  
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity, to which  
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
 With faculties still growing, feeling still  
 That whatsoever point they gain they still [340]  
 Have something to pursue. (1805.236-341)

This is the 1850 edition:

Blest the infant Babe [232]  
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace  
 Our Being's earthly progress), blest the Babe,  
 Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep [235]  
 Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul  
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!  
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists  
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts  
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense.[240]  
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:  
 Along his infant veins are interfused  
 The gravitation and the filial bond  
 Of nature that connect him with the world.  
 Is there a flower, to which he points with hand [245]  
 Too weak to gather it, already love  
 Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him  
 Hath beautified that flower; already shades  
 Of pity cast from inward tenderness  
 Do fall around him upon aught that bears [250]  
 Unsightly marks of violence or harm.  
 Emphatically such a Being lives,  
 Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,  
 An inmate of this active universe.  
 For feeling has to him imparted power [255]  
 That through the growing faculties of sense  
 Doth like an agent of the one great Mind  
 Create, creator and receiver both,  
 Working but in alliance with the works  
 Which it beholds.--Such, verily, is the first [260]  
 Poetic spirit of our human life,  
 By uniform control of after years,  
 In most, abated or suppressed; in some,  
 Through every change of growth and of decay,  
 Pre-eminent till death. From early days, [265]  
 Beginning not long after that first time  
 In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch  
 I held mute dialogues with my Mother's heart,  
 I have endeavoured to display the means

Whereby this infant sensibility, [270]  
 Great birthright of our being, was in me  
 Augmented and sustained. Yet is a path  
 More difficult before me; and I fear  
 That in its broken windings we shall need  
 The chamois' sinews, and the eagle's wing: [275]  
 For now a trouble came into my mind  
 From unknown causes. I was left alone  
 Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.  
 The props of my affections were removed,  
 And yet the building stood, as if sustained [280]  
 By its own spirit! All that I beheld  
 Was dear, and hence to finer influxes  
 The mind lay open--to a more exact  
 And close communication. Many are our joys  
 In youth, but oh! what happiness to live [285]  
 When every hour brings palpable access  
 Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,  
 And sorrow is not there! The seasons came,  
 And every season wheresoe'er I moved  
 Unfolded transitory qualities, [290]  
 Which, but for this most watchful power of love,  
 Had been neglected; left a register  
 Of permanent relations, else unknown.  
 Hence, life, and change, and beauty, solitude  
 More active even than 'best society'-- [295]  
 Society made sweet as solitude  
 By inward concords, silent, inobtrusive  
 And gentle agitations of the mind  
 From manifold distinctions, difference  
 Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,  
 [300]  
 No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
 Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone,  
 Under the quiet stars, and at that time  
 Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound  
 To breathe an elevated mood, by form [305]  
 Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,  
 If the night blackened with a coming storm,  
 Beneath some rock, listening to notes that are  
 The ghostly language of the ancient earth,  
 Or make their dim abode in distant winds.[310]  
 Thence did I drink the visionary power;  
 And deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
 Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
 That they [moods?] are kindred to our purer mind  
 And intellectual life; but that the soul, [315]  
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
 Of possible sublimity, whereto  
 With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
 With faculties still growing, feeling still [320]

That whatsoever point they gain, they yet  
Have something to pursue. (1850.2.232-322)

<sup>27</sup> In terms of diction, the repetition of mother without resorting to feminine pronouns emphasizes this significance. The capitalization of Mother in 1850 further stresses the mother's importance.

<sup>28</sup> John Donne uses this conceit repeatedly in Songs and Sonnets. See, for example, "Witchcraft by a Picture," "The Good Morrow," and "A Valediction of Weeping."

<sup>29</sup> D.W. Winnicott's "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications" in Playing and Reality makes a useful distinction between "relating" to an object (mother) in which the "subject [child] is an isolate" in which the object is "experienced as a projection" and "using" an object in which the object "must necessarily be real in the sense of being part of shared reality, not a bundle of projections" (88-9). In using, the mother is experienced more like a separate subject.

<sup>30</sup> Note that while the child may experience the mother as an object, she is in actuality a subject: "The mother is the baby's first object of attachment, and later, the object of desire. She is provider, interlocutor, caregiver, contingent reinforcer, significant other, empathic understander, mirror. She is also a secure presence to walk away from, a setter of limits, an optimal frustrator, a shockingly real outside otherness. She is external reality- -but she is rarely regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child . . . . the real mother is not simply an object for her child's demands; she is, in fact another subject whose independent center must be outside her child if she is to grant him the recognition he seeks" (Benjamin 23-4).

<sup>31</sup> Wordsworth's obscuring of the specifics of relationships between child and mother and child and Nature in 1805 represent a world view which Carol Gilligan generally attributes to women in In a Different Voice (see especially chapter 2). Gilligan sees women's world as "a world of relationships and psychological truths" (30); women tend to look at the details of a situation in terms of a "web of relationships" (32) in specifically human terms. On the other hand, Wordsworth's generalization of the poetic spirit as resulting from the child-Nature relationship (and not being so clearly rooted in the child-Mother relationship) represents a world view which Gilligan generally associates with men. Men tend to "abstract" or generalize in their descriptions of moral problems. In the

1805 version and in Gilligan's view of women, connection and the literal (mother) are valued while in the 1850 separation and metaphorical abstraction (Nature) are valued.

<sup>32</sup> In chapter 13 of Biographia Literaria Coleridge distinguishes between the receptive (primary imagination) and creative (secondary imagination) powers of the mind as well (1.304).

<sup>33</sup> Basing her argument on D.W. Winnicott's characterization of the child's mind, Benjamin says, "The object existed objectively, waiting to be found, and yet the infant has created it subjectively, as if it emerged from herself. This paradox is crucial to the evolving sense of reality" (43).

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Stern characterizes this "coming-into-being of organization" as the source of the poetic spirit, "the ultimate reservoir that can be dipped into for all creative experience" (Intersubjective 67).

<sup>35</sup> However, Kristeva notes that even though the semiotic is "heterogeneous to meaning . . . [it is] always in sight of it" (133).

<sup>36</sup> Retreats like this are characteristic of Wordsworth. For example, in the boat-stealing scene in book 1 of The Prelude (1850.1.357-424), the young Wordsworth feels the ecstasy of transgressing boundaries in stealing the boat, but instead of continuing on beyond the boundary, he turns back to the shore and returns the boat.

<sup>37</sup> I will continue to make 1805 the primary text of my analysis even though the revisions from 1805 to 1850 are not as drastic as in the previous sections. 1805 is the more appropriate text because understanding the rest of book two hinges on an understanding of the blessed babe section. Since 1805 presents a more "subjective" view of the mother, the rest of 1805 as a whole, as it hinges on the blessed babe section, will offer a more subjective view of the mother.

<sup>38</sup> See Weiskel's "Wordsworth and the Defile of the Word" (167-204).

<sup>39</sup> The editors of the Norton Prelude suggest that Nature itself is the "trouble" (N3, 80). This option has interesting possibilities in that instead of Mother Nature, Nature becomes a father which opens possibilities for viewing Nature as the missing "third term." However, I believe that both the recurring breast imagery associated with Nature and the shift from mother to Nature that the

1805 blessed babe section presents limit the plausibility of Nature as the third term, the father figure.

<sup>40</sup> See Onorato's discussion in The Character of the Poet (25-28, 158-160, 193, 375-76, 390-91) for more on the importance of Ann Cookson Wordsworth's actual death to Wordsworth's poetry.

<sup>41</sup> Winnicott details this idea extensively in "The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications" in Playing and Reality. See Benjamin (36-42) for a thorough discussion of destruction.

<sup>42</sup> As Benjamin argues from her intersubjective view, in this moment of seeming separation, "the issue is not [only] how we separate from oneness, but also how we connect to and recognize others; the issue is not how we become free of the other, but how we actively engage and make ourselves known in relationship to the other" (18).

<sup>43</sup> Line 303 is halved with the second half indented in 1805. The corresponding line 284 ("And close communication. Many are our joys") is joined together and not indented in 1850. See footnote 24 for clarification on this.

<sup>44</sup> Still is an especially effective adverb for Wordsworth because of its paradoxical connotations. Still connotes continuation ("they still have something to pursue") and also stasis (stand still).

<sup>45</sup> In "Desire in Language" Kristeva defines the semiotic "a term which quite clearly designates that we are dealing with a disposition that is definitely heterogeneous to meaning but always in sight of it or in either a negative or surplus relationship to it" (133).

<sup>46</sup> I rely on the 1850 text here because it foregrounds objects of nature as singular more overtly than 1805, though the objects observed are also singular in 1805.

<sup>47</sup> See note 6 on the relationship between Wordsworth's receptive and creative faculties and Coleridge's primary and secondary imagination.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin notes, "One of the most important insights of intersubjective theory is that sameness and difference exist simultaneously in mutual recognition" (47). Winnicott calls this paradoxical moment the capacity to be alone in the presence of an other in "The Capacity to Be Alone" in The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment (29-36).

<sup>49</sup> See Winnicott's "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena" in Playing and Reality (1-25), Susan Deri's "Transitional Phenomena: Vicissitudes of Symbolism and Creativity," and Ruth Miller's "Poetry as Transitional Object."

<sup>50</sup> The shift from nurse to feed is symptomatic of the repression Wordsworth carried out in revising the blessed babe passage as well (1805. 2.236-280 and 1850.2.232-265).

<sup>51</sup> The plastic power and auxiliar light are descriptions of the same force.

<sup>52</sup> Wordsworth addresses Coleridge directly at several points in book two.

Thou, my Friend! art one  
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee  
Science appears but what in truth she is,  
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,  
But as a succedaneum, and a prop  
To our infirmity. No officious slave  
Art thou of that false secondary power  
By which we multiply distinctions, then  
Deem that our puny boundaries are things  
That we perceive, and not that we have made.  
To thee, unblinded by these formal arts,  
The unity of all hath been revealed . . .  
(1850.2.210-221)

<sup>53</sup> Compare this statement to Wordsworth's comment in "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" that pleasure results from the mind's "perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder" (1802.57). I discuss this principle at length in chapter 3.

<sup>54</sup> Recall Kristeva's "Desire in Language": "The semiotic activity, which introduces wandering or fuzziness into language and, a fortiori, into poetic language is, from a synchronic point of view, a mark of the workings of drives (appropriation/rejection, orality/analality, love/hate, life/death), and from a diachronic point of view, stems from the archaisms of the semiotic body" (136).

<sup>55</sup> M. H. Abrams reads this moment as one of blissful merger in The Mirror and the Lamp. He remarks that "This experience of the one life with us and abroad cancels the division between . . . between subject and object" (66).

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**"SIMILITUDE IN DISSIMILITUDE": THE PARADOX OF  
RECOGNITION IN "THE PREFACE TO LYRICAL BALLADS"**

If imagining female voices of feeling opens an exciting resource for a male poet of feeling, Wordsworth's texts report a disturbing apprehension: that a man writing the feminine may be discovering and engendering more complex involvements of gender than he first imagined.

Susan Wolfson, "Lyrical Ballads and the  
Language of (Men) Feeling: Wordsworth Writing  
Women's Voices"

Mr. Wordsworth . . . gave considerable testimony of strong feeling and poetic powers [in Lyrical Ballads], although like a hysterical [sic] schoolgirl he had a knack of feeling about subjects with which feeling had no proper concern.

"Review of Poems, in Two Volumes," Le Beau Monde (1807) (Reiman)

In the previous chapter on book two of The Prelude, I examined how Wordsworth attributes the source of the poetic spirit to a dynamic of separation and connection. He marks the child's relationship with the mother and later the child's relationship with Nature in moments of recognition, of simultaneous identification and separation, as the source of the poetic spirit. These moments in which the child feels both similar to and distinct from the mother and then Nature mark the first instances when a child has an emergent sense of self and other, a feeling of the "coming into being of organization that is at the heart of creating and learning" (Stern Intersubjective 67). In that chapter I demonstrated how Wordsworth distinguished the significance of the child's relationship with the mother in moments of

recognition in the 1805 version and how by 1850 he had reduced the mother's importance significantly by substituting Nature in her place; I characterized this revision as a sign of Wordsworth's anxiety in associating the poetic spirit with the mother.

Wordsworth attributes a similar dynamic to poetic pleasure in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." In the final substantial section of the Preface he discusses the source of pleasure. He specifically points to the pleasure which readers receive from "metrical language" but more broadly addresses the principle upon which pleasure depends:

I mean the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. (57)<sup>1</sup>

Wordsworth says this perception of paradox (of tracing likenesses where difference seems predominant and tracing distinctions where resemblance seems prevalent) is at the root of pleasure, and since the "one restriction" under which the Poet writes is "the necessity of giving pleasure" (50), it follows that this paradox of similitude in dissimilitude or dissimilitude in similitude is, for Wordsworth at least, at the root of poetry.

I will show how the paradox of similitude in dissimilitude structures and defines many of Wordsworth's



poetic principles in different editions of the Preface, first in a major addition on the character of the Poet, and then in a major deletion on the purpose of his collection. For example, in his characterization of the Poet, Wordsworth argues that he<sup>2</sup> is a "man speaking to men" but ascribes qualities to him which within a nineteenth-century cultural context are feminine and maternal; he characterizes the Poet's relationship with his subjects as an experience of both identification and separation; he views the Poet's perception of Nature and mankind as both similar to and different from the perception of the rest of mankind; he believes that the Poet's discoveries explore the generalities of truth but that they at the same time embrace the particulars. In his discussion of rhythm, Wordsworth argues that pleasure results formally from the paradoxical effects of meter: it helps make the experience the Poet describes seem both similar to a real experience (the reader receives it as a reality because meter brings familiarity) and different from a real experience (meter creates a feeling of difference because its "regular impulses" remind readers of "real" reality). Even further, Wordsworth associates similitude in dissimilitude with the poetic purpose of the Lyrical Ballads, which is to explore the mind: a goal he accomplishes by examining the paradox of connection in separation in a series of poetic techniques and examples. In his first example, he models this paradox after mothers' experiences of separation from and connection

with their children, but with each succeeding technique, he gradually represses the maternal model; ultimately, with the 1836 edition of the Preface, he erases all reference to the mother-child model.

Since Wordsworth only explicitly refers to mothers briefly in the Preface, why do I use the term maternal to describe the dynamic of similitude and dissimilitude that recurs in his poetics? In general psychoanalytic theory and in Wordsworth's own work (i.e., book two of The Prelude), the earliest model for this dynamic is the mother's relationship with the child or the child's relationship with the mother in an experience of recognition; this experience can and does of course become manifest in an individual's relationship with others, others who are not always mothers. However, the dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude is most clearly manifested in Wordsworth's poetry in the mother-child relationship--it is the matrix for later manifestations--and placing this template over the representation of other human relationships throws into relief the significance of connection and separation in Wordsworth's poetry.

The word maternal is also appropriate because even though Wordsworth acknowledges the significance of the mother-child bond early in his work, his later revisions of early work (those which are generally considered "authoritative") mostly elide the mother's significance but at the same time retain the significance of the dynamic of

paradox which is predicated on the child's relationship with the mother (and vice versa). In addition, maternal almost always evokes a feminine figure so that applying the term to Wordsworth has a jarring effect; I use the word to encourage readers to question the social roles and functions generally associated with each sex in Wordsworth's poetry. Even though Wordsworth operates in a system of opposites in The Prelude and the Preface, by often juxtaposing these opposites (by associating "feminine" qualities like "feeling" with the Poet as a "man"), he critiques such logic and complicates his treatment of the Poet.

With the major addition of the section on the Poet and the deletion of the description of the poetic techniques used to explore the mind, Wordsworth displays anxiety over associating the mother with his poetics. Even though he elides or displaces gendered associations of the mother with poetry as he revises, a maternal dynamic from which he tries to conceal gender remains significant. While this ostensibly ungendered dynamic is safer for Wordsworth because it does not connote as definitively a dependence on the mother, the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude serves as the matrix for Wordsworth's definition of the Poet and for his exploration of the mind.

#### **Changing Distinctions Between Poetry and Prose: Meter and the Language of Men**

In this section, I will explore how "similitude in dissimilitude" structures Wordsworth's view of the

relationship between poetry and prose and how both forms of expression are also gendered terms in the 1800 and 1802 editions of the Preface. In both editions, Wordsworth personifies poetry as a female and argues that it is very similar to prose; however, at the same time, he struggles to explain the qualities which make poetry different and distinct from prose. In 1800 he embraces the semiotic quality of meter as the primary means to distinguish between prose and poetry, but in 1802 he shifts to an overtly gendered "selection of the language really spoken by men" (my emphasis) as the primary mark of distinction and gives meter secondary emphasis. I believe this change in emphasis is another sign of Wordsworth's anxiety in associating poetry with the mother. He is vague about how the Poet "selects" this "language really spoken by men" (which is both similar and dissimilar to prose) and instead of specifying how the Poet selects, he turns in 1802 to the character of the Poet (which he constructs as distinctly masculine) in order to demonstrate what qualities enable him to create poetry. Yet, even though Wordsworth repeatedly displaces the mother, throughout this section he retains the maternal matrix of similitude in dissimilitude to describe his poetics, a model predicated on the blessed babe's experience of recognition with the mother in book two of The Prelude.

Wordsworth uses similitude in dissimilitude to structure his poetics when he compares poetry to prose. In describing the similarity between the two he says,

there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connection sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both. (47)

Here Wordsworth personifies poetry as female, as a "Sister" to painting, and says that like prose "she" "speaks," is "clothed," and has "affections."<sup>3</sup> He compares poetry and prose in terms of a body and of bodily functions, presumably female: "organs," "bodies," "tears," "vital juices," "human blood," and "veins." His aim is to show how similar the language of prose and poetry are in order to refute the prevailing eighteenth-century notion that holds poetry high above prose.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he seeks to show this connection, he also seeks a quality with which to distinguish their difference: that distinction is meter.

As we have seen in chapter two, Kristeva argues persuasively that the rhythmic qualities of language are derived from a child's relationship with the mother's body "when instinctual drives are organized, and rhythmic models

developed" (Stanton 166).<sup>5</sup> If children, in fact, learn rhythm from their relationships with the mother's body, it seems plausible that Wordsworth's attitudes about rhythm were associated with the mother as well. Indeed, Wordsworth's own discussion of the "mute dialogues" he held with his "mother's heart" in The Prelude suggests this kind of semiotic activity which precedes more symbolic figuration (1805.2.283).<sup>6</sup>

Between 1800 and 1802, Wordsworth changes his view of the significance of meter in the Preface. In a footnote in the 1800 edition of the Preface he says, "The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre" (Owen 134). However, in 1802 he qualifies his remark: "nor is this, in truth a strict antithesis; because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable" (Zall 47). As we have seen before, Wordsworth significantly alters his poetic theory from edition to edition. In 1800 he considers meter as the definite mark of peculiarity which separates prose from poetry, but by 1802 he recognizes that meter naturally occurs in some passages of prose so that it cannot be so distinctive a feature of poetry as he previously thought. Why does he change his view? Quite probably, Wordsworth realizes empirically that some prose does in fact have a regular, rhythmic quality which resembles meter. However, when we consider his construction of poetry as feminine, his anxiety over meter as the mark of distinction between prose

and poetry, Kristeva's argument that rhythm is, in fact, derived from the relationship with the maternal body, and Wordsworth's own association of semiotic activity with the mother, this shift and anxiety seem to be related to the mother-child relationship. The combination of a feminine poetry with a meter he implicitly associates with the mother (and Kristeva argues is derived from the mother-child relationship) helps explain why Wordsworth might be backing away from seeing meter as the determinant of poetry. From a nineteenth-century perspective, to mark poetry's distinction in terms of the mother is to reduce the Poet's power, to make him dependent on the mother. Just as Wordsworth qualifies his attribution of the poetic spirit to the mother through revision in The Prelude, he also qualifies his attribution of meter, the rhythmic repetition first experienced with the mother's body, as the distinctive quality of poetry in his footnote.

After thematically personifying poetry as female, in the very next paragraph of the Preface Wordsworth begins to develop his discussion of meter and rhyme. The placement of his emphasis on these semiotic qualities is significant because he follows his thematic discussion of poetry as "feminine" immediately with a linguistic discussion of these mother-associated semiotic activities. In both editions, he begins:

If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical  
arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction  
which overturns what I have been saying on the

strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that . . . . (1800:136; 1802:47)

Both editions of this paragraph begin with an expression of anxiety: Wordsworth worries that readers may view his association of rhyme and meter with poetry as a slippery slope which will allow the inclusion of the "artificial distinctions" which will make poetry unnatural and separate it distinctively from prose.

However, even more interesting than Wordsworth's juxtaposition of his female personification of poetry with the invocation of semiotic components of language is the way he abruptly breaks off the discussion of meter in 1802. In 1800 he affirms that meter is an accurate distinction between prose and poetry because "the distinction of rhyme and metre is uniform and regular" while the distinction which is produced by "poetic diction is arbitrary and subject to the infinite caprices upon which no calculation can be made" (1800:144).<sup>7</sup> He feels that the effects of meter and diction are incomparable: meter's effects can be controlled but diction's effects/associations are ungovernable. To say that meter opens the door to admitting "artificial distinctions" (distinctions which he associates with personification and "mechanical devices of style") is, for Wordsworth, unfair because meter is a different type of linguistic quality than those other "artificial distinctions" which bear meaning.<sup>8</sup>



In 1802 he shifts ground from meter to diction, a diction which is overtly gendered as masculine, in order to refute the counter-argument that meter admits artificial distinctions: "I answer that the language of such Poetry as I am recommending is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men." Further, in a move to explain his defensiveness, he fashions himself as Poet with an overtly masculine simile, likening himself to "a man fighting a battle without enemies" (48). His simile pointedly excludes women. Though nineteenth-century writers commonly refer to men and women when they use men in the general sense, at this moment in the Preface, Wordsworth begins to use masculine nouns and pronouns in much greater concentration than at any other point in the Preface (in other sections he chooses more inclusive nouns like persons and humans). Wordsworth's insertions in 1802 of references to the language of "men" and to a man/Poet fighting battles serve as initial defenses against a poetry figured as feminine and characterized by meter. However, he does not drop his discussion of meter completely in 1802; instead, he displaces meter to a section which follows his fashioning of the Poet as a decidedly male figure, a passage I will address shortly (1802.54).

Structurally, the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude is also present in Wordsworth's distinction between the natural language of prose and poetry in 1802 though he does not rely as heavily on gender to distinguish

them. He has determined that meter on its own is not an adequate distinction to separate prose and poetry, so he relies on the Poet's use of selection of language:

this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. (1802.47)

Wordsworth uses the principle of selection to make the language of poetry both similar to and dissimilar from the natural language of prose. He selects words from the body of language that make poetic language of natural language, but not the same as natural language because he is selecting with "true taste and feeling."<sup>9</sup> To Wordsworth, poetic language is paradoxically the same as but different from natural language. In addition, he uses meter to grant poetic language which is taken from natural language a greater "dissimilitude": the combination of the semiotic quality of meter with the language selected from the language of men gives the "rational mind" even greater pleasure or "gratification" than it would otherwise. Because of the similarity between poetic language and "natural" language of prose and the dissimilarity created by selection from the language of prose and the addition of meter, pleasure results in poetry. Clearly, similitude in dissimilitude structures Wordsworth's poetics in distinguishing between poetry and prose.

So in this section of the Preface, Wordsworth's revisions seem even more subtly related to anxiety over associating poetic language with the mother and the mother's body than in book two of The Prelude. From an overtly feminine personification of poetry in which Wordsworth stresses poetry's similarity to prose, he proceeds to a discussion of the semiotic components of language like rhythm and meter to mark its distinction from prose: he complements his feminine personification of poetry with meter which Wordsworth associates with the mother in The Prelude. In the 1800 edition, he accepts the distinctiveness which meter and rhyme give poetry, but in 1802 he says that a "selection of the language really used by men" is the primary mark of distinction between poetry and prose while meter is secondary. Yet, for Wordsworth, this assertion of poetry as a "selection of the language really used by men" is not enough to limit the feminine and semiotic in his description of poetry. Consequently, in the next long section of the Preface which Wordsworth added in 1802, he inserts a discussion of the Poet which is laden with masculine pronouns and diction to further distance the Poet from the mother even though his description relies on the matrix of the poetic spirit, the dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude first experienced with the mother.

### **The Figure of the Poet**

In the 1802 edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth adds a long section to his Preface in which he uses the dynamic

of similitude in dissimilitude to define what the Poet is and does. First, he constructs the Poet as a masculine figure but at the same time gives him feminine qualities. Then, he describes the Poet's relationship with his poetic subjects in terms that first appear to be identification--he takes on the subjects' identities or imitates their behavior--but the relationship ultimately comes to be one of identification and differentiation, of also maintaining his own separate identity. In the next paragraph, he characterizes the Poet as being the same as humankind, but simultaneously different; humankind is able to sympathize with objects of Nature and the rest of humanity, but only the Poet is self-conscious about this act of sympathy. In the final part of the addition, Wordsworth initially seems to characterize the Scientist and Poet as polar opposites, but gradually he suggests that the Poet, paradoxically, subsumes the Scientist. He begins the addition with gendered associations of the Poet with the mother, but in the rest of the section he splits that association off and characterizes the Poet in terms which are gender-neutral, all the while retaining the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude.

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In the first part of the section on the Poet, Wordsworth overtly discusses the Poet in gendered terms. In answer to his questions "what is meant by the word Poet?

What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself? And what language is to be expected from him?" Wordsworth replies:

He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. (48-9, my emphasis)

Wordsworth seems very anxious to describe the Poet as a male figure by using masculine nouns and pronouns nine times in this passage and a more neutral noun, "human," only once. The repetition of "man" seems uncharacteristically excessive, but in light of his depiction of the Poet with words like sensibility and tenderness, and passion, the hyperbolized manly characterization begins to make sense because such words refer to qualities which were, within a nineteenth-century historical context, associated with women. As Anne Mellor notes, "historically, the realm of emotions, love, and sensibility had been assigned to the feminine gender; women might not be able to think rationally, but they could love passionately" (Romanticism and Gender 23).

More specifically, Susan J. Wolfson notes that Coleridge (Wordsworth's collaborator on Lyrical Ballads) denigrates the term sensibility as "the delicate exercise of a 'fine Lady's nerves' as she reads and 'weep[s]' over the

refined sorrows' of fictional characters and deem[s] it an agent of 'effeminate and cowardly selfishness'" (32).<sup>10</sup> In addition, the nineteenth-century essayist Sarah Stickney Ellis in her best-seller The Mothers of England; Their Influence and Responsibility (1844) considers tenderness as one of a mother's most important qualities: "It is of the highest importance" for the mother to exhibit sympathy "through the medium of tenderness . . . to inspire a confidence on the part of the young, in the mother's undeviating desire to promote their happiness" (33). In this context, Wordsworth even further "feminizes" his poetics earlier in the Preface by affirming that in his poetry "the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (43). In other words, the feeling or tone is primary while the action or plot is secondary. Having personified a poetry which is feminine, stressed the importance of feeling in his poetry, and bestowed the Poet with qualities associated with women and mothers, the repetition of masculine nouns and pronouns seems to serve as a strategy to deflect criticism of an effeminate poetics.<sup>11</sup>

However, despite his repeated association of the Poet with a masculine figure, many contemporary critics still saw Wordsworth's poetics and practice as overly feminine, and they consequently degraded him. Le Beau Monde's reviewer characterizes Wordsworth as "a hysterical schoolgirl" (Reiman 40) and reads his passion as feminine hysteria.

Judith Page argues insightfully that Francis Jeffrey, in his review of Poems, in Two Volumes for the Edinburgh Review, implies that "serious male poets do not write poems on daisies or daffodils" (38): Jeffrey maligns Wordsworth's "tender" "childish" subjects in favor of the "manly lines" of poems like "The Character of the Happy Warrior" (Reiman 431-432). Wordsworth seemed to know that many of his subjects (mad mothers, deserted women, children) and forms (Jeffrey sees one of his sources as the rhymes of "plebeian nurseries" [Reiman 431]) would associate him with the feminine sphere. However, I believe his exaggerated and repeated emphasis on the masculinity of the Poet serves more specifically as a defense against anxiety about and reliance on upon mothers to write poetry and define his poetics.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Wordsworth's construction of the Poet as unequivocally male does exhibit an extremely narrow view of the figure of the Poet, a view that is not surprising in terms of literary and linguistic history, I believe that his strategy suggests a more progressive view as well. The juxtaposition of masculine role, man, and feminine characteristics, "sensibility" and "tenderness," displays a willingness to resist the traditional polarity between masculinity and femininity, and the fact that he tries to circumvent this polarity suggests that he conceptualizes gender roles beyond biological determination and that the attribution of feminine qualities to men is not necessarily a denigration. Male figures possess typically "feminine"

qualities of tenderness and sensibility in poems like "The Last of the Flock," "Michael," and "The Childless Father," but female figures also possess traditionally "masculine" qualities like physical strength and heroism in poems like "The Westmoreland Girl" and "Grace Darling." Of course, I do not mean to argue that Wordsworth consciously strives to alter the patriarchal system, yet he does at times conceptualize gender as socially constructed and viewing its definition as more complicated than a polarized set of contrary values assigned to each sex--an exercise many of his contemporaries practiced.<sup>13</sup>

But what ramifications does this more complicated conception of gender have for Wordsworth's poetic as maternal and not simply feminine or androgynous?<sup>14</sup> In the description of the Poet, Wordsworth creates a figure who is one with mankind, a (hu)mankind (represented by "human nature") which is classified as exclusively masculine, but the Poet is also, and at the same time, different in terms which (within a nineteenth-century cultural context) connote femininity.<sup>15</sup> The Poet's identity is predicated on the paradox of the separation/connection model: he is separated from mankind in that he has greater "sensibility," "tenderness," and "passion," but he is connected to mankind in that he is a "man speaking to men." Wordsworth thus constructs the figure of the Poet in terms of similitude in dissimilitude, a model which resists dichotomy and sustains paradox. Wordsworth's revisions of this section of the



Preface do not reveal the source of the Poet's identity as being directly associated with a mother or a mother-child relationship (as in book two of The Prelude), so that we might simply view the Poet as an androgynous figure. However, the continuing pattern of sustaining the separation/connection paradox in the figure of the Poet has evolved from the child's experience of recognition with the mother, which Wordsworth identifies as the matrix for the poetic spirit.

But again, I should emphasize why I characterize Wordsworth's Poet as maternal. I use the word because, in Wordsworth's system, the child's first experience of recognition--perceiving commonality through difference and sustaining the balance between separateness and connection--with the mother shapes the poetic spirit. Even though Wordsworth acknowledges the significance of the bond early in his work, his later revisions of early work (those with which readers are most familiar) mostly elide the mother's significance but retain the significance of the dynamic of paradox predicated on the child's relationship with the mother (and vice versa). Using the word maternal is a way to expose the source of the model for the dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude.

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In the 1802 addition, Wordsworth also juxtaposes opposites of connection and separation in describing the faculty the Poet uses to relate to the people he depicts in

his poetry, but in this instance gender is not an issue. At first this capability may appear to be purely one of identification, which emphasizes sameness ("I am like you," or extremely, "I am you"), but in fact, the capability Wordsworth describes is more like recognition, which paradoxically encompasses similarity and difference:

it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he described, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him, by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. (49)

Even though Wordsworth argues that the Poet should "confound and identify his own feelings" with those of the persons he describes, he also contends that the Poet does this "for short spaces of time" and that the language he uses will be "modified" for the purpose of "giving pleasure."<sup>16</sup> Just as in his description of the "blessed babe" and his mother in 1805, Wordsworth's Poet does not completely merge his identity with the people he describes; he also perceives his separateness. The Poet paradoxically identifies with the other but also maintains a feeling of difference--a paradoxical experience that can be expressed through poetry.<sup>17</sup> This "delusion" is an adult version of the child's experience of Winnicott's "transitional realm," the state "in which the child can play and create as if the outside were as malleable as his own fantasy" (Benjamin 41).<sup>18</sup> By "confounding" his feelings with "the persons whose feelings

he describe[s]," the Poet not only makes the other's feelings his but also imaginatively makes his feelings theirs. A part of the Poet stands beyond the experience of identification and crafts language using all the techniques of a Poet's arsenal to give pleasure; thus, the dynamic sustains merger and distance simultaneously.

This pattern is most clearly manifested in poems like "The Emigrant Mother" and "Her Eyes Are Wild" which have metapoetic introductions in which the narrator vividly displays his identification and separation from his subjects (in these examples, mothers). However, the other is not always a mother, for we see the same metapoetic pattern in poems like "The Oak and Broom" and "The Pet Lamb." Even though the pattern occurs in poems that do not contain actual mothers, it emerges more frequently in poems with mothers. No matter whether mothers appear or not, the Poet's relationship with the poetic subject is predicated on the maternal matrix: it is repeatedly a relationship characterized by an explicit awareness of the Poet's feeling of simultaneous similarity to and difference from the subject, a feeling of similitude in dissimilitude.

\* \* \*

Wordsworth's description in the 1802 addition of what the Poet "does" presents another similar paradox in the Preface. He says the Poet

considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and

in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions which by habit become of the nature of intuitions. (51)

First, the Poet observes man and Nature/the-external-world and the way they act upon each other; he grants agency to both "man" and "objects." Next, he says the Poet considers "man in his own nature"; nature in this case does not refer to the external world, but to human nature as the associations with "knowledge," "convictions," and "intuitions" suggest. The most ambiguous part of this passage is the referent to the demonstrative pronoun this. The sequencing and punctuation suggest that the most likely referent is the preceding clause: the Poet's observation of man and objects interacting to produce a complexity of pleasure and pain. The resulting sense is this: the Poet views man observing the interaction between his fellow men and objects that produces the complexity of pleasure and pain. We have something like a box in a box: the Poet witnesses man experiencing what the Poet also observes about man. Wordsworth's characterization makes the identification of Poet with man even closer; the two are engaged in a similar activity in a circular, paradoxical structure, except that the man's experience is "immediate" while the Poet's is mediated. But Wordsworth complicates this description even further; he says the Poet

considers him [man] as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him

sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment. (51)

Poet and man are engaged in a similar activity. The only difference seems to be that the Poet is aware of man observing; he seems to be more self-conscious (singular) while at the same time losing himself in the "overbalance of enjoyment," in the "infinite complexity." The man, on the other hand, seems to lose himself in the experience, to revel "immediately" in the pleasure. Wordsworth's characterizations of Dorothy's and his own different experiences with nature in "Tintern Abbey" present clear illustrations of both "the man's" and "the Poet's" experience as described in the Preface. Dorothy's experience is one of "dizzy raptures" and "thoughtless youth" (86, 91), but William's is more sober because he is revisiting the Wye after "five long Winters" (2).<sup>19</sup> Just as for "the man," Dorothy's experience is immediate, while just as for "the Poet," Wordsworth's experience is both immediate and detached. While both the Poet and the man experience the pleasure of "sympathies," the Poet connects with the infinite complexity while at the same time maintaining his distance; the man, on the other hand, does not remain aloof. The Poet experiences identification and differentiation, but the man appears to experience only identification in this particular moment of pleasure. From my perspective, the Poet's experience is maternal not because of any thematic associations with the mother;

indeed, Wordsworth backs away from a thematic, gendered association. The Poet's experience is maternal because he identifies himself with and differentiates himself from man and nature: his experience is one of similitude in dissimilitude, an experience predicated on the maternal matrix.<sup>20</sup>

\* \* \*

As he continues in the addition, Wordsworth again uses the strategy of contrast to define what the Poet is and does, but in this next instance, the contrast is with the Man of Science.<sup>21</sup> Both the Man of Science and the Poet receive pleasure from their studies, but they receive them from different "conversations": the Scientist "converses with particular parts of nature" while the Poet "converses with general nature" (52). The knowledge of both the Man of Science and the Poet is pleasure; however, the knowledge of the Scientist is a "personal and individual acquisition" and does not "connect[] us with our fellow-beings" while the knowledge of the Poet is "a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance" (52) which does connect us to our fellow human beings. For the Man of Science, truth is a "remote and unknown benefactor . . . . [which] he cherishes and loves. . . in his solitude" while the Poet, "singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion" (52). Wordsworth associates the Man of Science with "the particular," "the individual,"

the disconnected, "the remote," and with "solitude," but he associates the Poet with "the general," "the unalienable," "the connected," "the join[ed]," and with "companions." Within a nineteenth-century context, the Scientist at first appears to represent a masculine figure who maintains distance and individuality while the Poet appears to represent a more feminine figure as he connects with the community surrounding him. Indeed, the catalogue of oppositions makes Poet and Scientist seem to exist exclusively as polar opposites.

However, Wordsworth's Poet subsumes the Man of Science: "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science" (52). Poetry encompasses all knowledge; it expresses with passion what Science expresses on the face. Wordsworth joins within poetry two activities, passion and knowledge, which linguistic and literary history have generally separated. Even though the Poet is viewed as very different from the Scientist, the Poet incorporates the Scientist into himself: he is also the same as the Scientist. Once again, Wordsworth's Poet connects with but is separate from the other; he is a figure of similitude in dissimilitude.

\* \* \*

Wordsworth's lengthy addition on what the Poet is and does in the 1802 Preface serves two primary functions. First, it serves as a defense against his explicitly

feminine characterization of Poetry (the "Sister" characterized by her body) and also his early view that meter (a semiotic quality which I associate with the mother) is the primary distinction between poetry and prose. Without the assertion of Poet as Man and the shift away from meter, the Poet becomes, within the cultural context, a weak, feminine, dependent figure. However, the addition retains the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude which is so central to Wordsworth's poetics. Even though in early versions, the dynamic is clearly gendered, the repetition of this dynamic becomes less and less gendered because Wordsworth splits off the association of feminine with mother as he progresses in his description of the Poet. Wordsworth gradually accrues qualities from other groups for the Poet: from Poet as a masculine figure with feminine qualities, he shifts to the Poet's relationship with his subjects, a comparison of the Poet with other men, and a comparison of the Poet with the Scientist; all of these comparisons are structured on the model of similitude in dissimilitude.

### **The Paradoxical Power of Meter**

After digressing into his definition of the Poet and his behavior in 1802, Wordsworth returns to the discussion of meter, which was originally written in 1800. Even though in 1802 he shifts emphasis from meter to the principle of selection as the primary mark of distinction for poetry, he does not elide the significance of meter entirely; he simply



displaces it to a later space in the text after he has characterized the Poet as an explicitly masculine figure. The semiotic, mother-associated quality of meter remains an important part of Wordsworth's treatment of poetry, but he seems to need to assert the Poet's masculinity before he can return to this quality. His actual explanation of meter is interesting because he again falls into the pattern of paradox which he uses repeatedly in the Preface to describe his poetics and also because, as W. J. B. Owen remarks, he "probes more deeply than any considerable earlier critics, into the psychological bases of the effect of ordinary metrical patterns" (36). Wordsworth sees meter as a quality which causes readers both to connect with and to separate from the verisimilitude of a poem, a quality that can lead readers to identify with, as well as distinguish themselves from, the characters and action of a poem. As in his description of the Poet, Wordsworth describes the effects of meter in terms of the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude.

One of Wordsworth's aims in this section is to explain why he writes in meter. The primary reason he offers is that "words metrically arranged will long continue to impart . . . pleasure to mankind" (56). The gendered diction of masculinity enters his explanation once again when he asserts that verse will endure only if "the style is manly, and the subject [is] of some importance" (56, my emphasis). He never clearly explains what "manly style" is and

precisely why it is necessary, but a poetry including only meter (semiotic and mother-associated) and important subjects (which Wordsworth repeatedly associates with mothers, as I will demonstrate in the final section of this chapter) would not be a lasting poetry without it.

Wordsworth again falls into the pattern of balancing a function of language which is implicitly semiotic with a function which he characterizes as explicitly masculine.

Since he is treating such an intrinsically semiotic quality of language which is so closely associated with the mother, his invocation of "manly style" helps assuage some of his anxiety of associating his poetics with the mother and the semiotic.

Along with the anxiety toward the mother we can observe in a thematic analysis of Wordsworth's Preface, we can also see Wordsworth return to his use of the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude in his discussion of meter's effects: meter both brings and limits pleasure. Wordsworth says that "a small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends on metre" (55), but likewise observes that meter plays an important part in regulating "the end" (the aim) of poetry which "is to produce excitement in co-existence with an over-balance of pleasure" (56). This excitement is an "unusual even irregular state of the mind" in which "ideas and feelings do not . . . succeed each other in accustomed order" (56). Occasionally, Wordsworth says the words that produce excitement are very "powerful" or the "images and

feelings" they create may "have an undue proportion of pain connected with them" so that "there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds" (56).

In other words, readers become caught up in the verisimilitude of the moment and lose their distance. In order to keep the excitement from going beyond the "proper bounds," he says,

the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. (56)

In this instance, meter helps to keep the "unusual" and "irregular" states of excitement within bounds; the "co-presence" of meter "tempers" and "restrains" passions and pleasure because meter is "regular" and because the mind is "accustomed to" meter. The dissimilitude of excitement is regulated by the similitude of meter. He contends that meter may restrict passion in describing instances which may be too extreme or pathetic because "small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise" (57) affect the reader. Meter reminds readers of their separateness from the action of the poem, that they are outside the action.

In the 1800 edition, after developing the restrictive powers of meter, Wordsworth returns to his view that meter may add pleasure to language in instances where the Poet's words are "inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement" because of the pleasure the reader

"has been accustomed to connect with metre in general" (Owen 148). However, his explanation of why meter brings pleasure is vaguely construed; he simply says, "there will be something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words" (148).

In 1802, Wordsworth inserts a long sentence in between these two opposing notions that yokes meter's paradoxical effects together. Meter breaks the reader's experience of verisimilitude in the poem: it "divest[s] language in a certain degree of its [perceived] reality, and thus . . . throw[s] a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition" (56). Just as in the Poet's relationship with "the persons whose feelings he describes" in which "for short spaces of time" he "slip[s] into an entire delusion" (49) (discussed in the previous section) meter also throws a "half consciousness" over the poem (when read) which divests it "in a certain degree of its reality." Meter does not completely break the perceived reality of the poem but only partially ruptures it. The Poet's paradoxical identification and differentiation of the person whose feelings he describes leads him into a sort of transitional realm, a space of creativity and receptivity. The paradoxical function of meter affects the reader in a similar way: it helps make the experience the poet describes seem both similar to a real experience (the reader receives it as a reality because meter brings familiarity) and different from a real experience (meter creates a

feeling of difference because its "regular impulses" remind readers of "real" reality; the impulses rupture verisimilitude). The Poet enters a transitional realm to create poetry, and meter seems to be a way for the Poet to bring the reader into a similar transitional realm: a realm in which "the perception of similitude in dissimilitude is the source of pleasure" (57).

By displacing the section on meter to a space after his characterization of the masculine figure of the Poet and making meter a secondary quality to mark poetry's distinction from prose in 1802, Wordsworth both displays and alleviates his own anxiety over associating the semiotic quality of meter with his poetry. He is able to keep meter as a significant part of his description of poetry while not maintaining it as the primary distinction from prose or "natural language." In addition, the way that he uses the model of similitude in dissimilitude displays his continuing reliance on the maternal matrix to define his poetics even though this model is split off from a gendered, feminine association with the mother.

#### **Separation in Connection: The Mother as Means and Model**

While the bulk of my analysis has been concerned with a major addition to the Preface, now I turn to a significant deletion. The section which Wordsworth erases in 1836 is a description of the poetic techniques he uses to explore the workings of the mind--the stated purpose of his collection. Until 1836 Wordsworth says,

I have said that each of these poems has a purpose. I have also informed my Reader what this purpose will be found principally to be: namely to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But speaking in language somewhat more appropriate, it is to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature. This object I have endeavored in these short essays to attain by tracing the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings, as in the poems of the IDIOT BOY and the MAD MOTHER; by accompanying the last struggles of a human being, at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society, as in the Poem of the FORSAKEN INDIAN; by shewing, as in the Stanzas entitled WE ARE SEVEN, the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion; or by displaying the strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with great and beautiful objects of nature, as in THE BROTHERS; or as in the Incident of SIMON LEE, by placing my Reader in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them. (42-3)

First he describes the purpose of his poetic project which is to show how "our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement" or "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature" (42). To "follow" these "fluxes and refluxes" Wordsworth lists five means:

- 1) tracking maternal passions
- 2) following a human being's struggle as death nears
- 3) presenting a child's conceptualization of death
- 4) displaying fraternal, or moral, bonds resulting from being reared in Nature
- 5) situating readers so that moral sensations give them a different or improved impression than usual.

Although only the first method or technique seems clearly tied to the mother, the sample poems that Wordsworth

utilizes to illustrate the remaining four techniques contain mothers or relationships that are modeled after mother-child relationships. Of course these poems are poems and not simply devices for illustrating his thesis (the poems/essays were, after all, written before the Preface); however, Wordsworth's selection of the "essays" as examples of the techniques-in-practice makes them appropriate avenues by which to examine and understand the general techniques.

In all of these techniques, reconciling the paradox of connection in separation, or similitude in dissimilitude, seems to be the means of exploring the operation of the mind, Wordsworth's stated "object" of the collection. In the first technique Wordsworth expressly uses a mother-child relationship to analyze the workings of the mind, but with each of the sample "essays" used to illustrate the next three methods, Wordsworth increasingly distances the maternal dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude from the mother-child relationship. In the final method, the key to studying the mind's functioning is observing the dynamic between separation and connection (a dynamic which has been maternally cast in the previous methods), but mothers are not represented at all in the sample poem; Wordsworth completely disengages himself from the mother-child model. Both his gradual distancing from the mother in the progression of techniques and his complete erasure in 1836 of the paragraph which describes the five techniques in the Preface suggest the same sort of anxiety that Wordsworth

displays in his other revisions of the Preface and his revisions of book two of The Prelude. In effect, in the development of his poetics and revision of the Preface, Wordsworth most clearly enacts his own separation from the mother while retaining the importance of the separation/connection dynamic which she represents for his poetics. For Wordsworth, considering the mother in poems is one thing, but to making her significance to the collection's purpose definitive (late in his career, especially) marks a dependence that might reduce the Poet's power in the eyes of readers and diminish his perceived difference from other men.

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First, Wordsworth says he examines the oscillations of the mind by tracking the maternal passions in "The Idiot Boy" and "The Mad Mother."<sup>22</sup> In both poems Wordsworth uses a mother's resistance to separation from her child and a desire for connection with the child to observe the fluxes and refluxes of the mind. Betty Foy initiates separation from her son, Johnny, by sending him to fetch a doctor for the ailing Susan Gale in "The Idiot Boy."<sup>23</sup> When he fails to return, Betty searches desperately for Johnny until she happily reunites with him. Betty's separation from Johnny leads her to imagine numerous fates for her absent son: perhaps he "hunt[s] the moon that's in the brook" (225), "'perhaps he climbed into and oak'" (232), perhaps "'that wicked pony'" has carried him "'to . . . the goblin's hall'"



(237-38). When she does actually find the lost Johnny, the narrator suggests that she initially thinks he is a ghost:

Why stand you thus good Betty Foy?  
It is no goblin, 'tis no ghost,  
'Tis he whom you so long have lost,  
He whom you love your idiot boy. (377-380)

When confronted by the reality of her actual son, she does not hold onto her fantasy of his falling into a brook or being captured by goblins.

In "The Mad Mother," the mother revels in the pleasure of breast-feeding her infant and longs to merge completely with him as the two escape society by fleeing into the wilderness.<sup>24</sup> Because her husband deserts her, the Mad Mother clings desperately to her son to assuage the pain of abandonment; the child becomes a substitute for the husband, and the filial connection soothes her madness and suspends her hallucinations of "fiendish faces" at "her breasts" (23-24).

In these two poems "maternal passion" seems to equal a mother's desire for connection or reconnection with the child: the connection in "The Idiot Boy" is balanced with differentiation in that Betty knows she is imagining Johnny's fate and does not desire a complete merger, but the Mad Mother is not self-aware about her hallucinations and seeks an absolute connection with her son. With these different mother-models, Wordsworth most explicitly uses the dynamic between separation and a longing for connection to show how "feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement," and the mind can create its own internal

reality and imagine the figures from which the mothers have been separated.

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Wordsworth also investigates the fluctuations of the mind "by accompanying the last struggles of a human being, at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society" (42). Unlike the previous technique, this one does not refer to the mother; however, one of the central issues of the sample poem, "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman," is the separation of a mother from her infant son. The tribe has taken the child from his mother and leaves her to die in the snow because the mother is too weak to keep up with the tribe's pace. In her exile she recalls the actual separation from her son, and the son's desperate response when they gave him to another woman. She imaginatively constructs a mental representation of her son and consoles him as if he were actually with her and in exile: "Then do not weep and grieve for me; / I feel I must have died with thee"; she reassures him that she would have died with him even if she had continued (43-44). From death with the son as a consolation, she shifts more explicitly to her own active desire to die with her child in her arms: "if I / For once could have thee close to me, / With happy heart I then would die" (65-7). Death with the child is a "happy" death. Certainly, Wordsworth focuses on a "human being's" response to death in the first three stanzas in order to examine the mind, but the final four stanzas almost exclusively stress

this "human being's" separation as a mother: Wordsworth emphasizes the Native American mother's response to separation from her son and her desire to be reunited with him. He presents her as facing two extreme forms of separation (her own death and the fracture of the filial bond) to display the adult human mind's desire for union (with the infant in this case) in the midst of extreme separation and to demonstrate the way the mind can compensate for separation by forming mental images and narrative conjecture about the absent party (the son) through the imagination. In this instance, Wordsworth explores the mind by casting from a mother's perspective the "life and society" that a "human being" cleaves to as death approaches.

\* \* \*

Wordsworth explores the mind by considering "the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death, or rather our utter inability to admit that notion" (43). In "We Are Seven," he includes a mother (though she is not actually present) and, as in the previous examples, examines death, separation, and connection. When the speaker asks the little girl how many siblings she has, she tells him "seven," acknowledging that two live in Conway, two are at sea, and

"Two of us in the church-yard lie,  
 "My sister and my brother;  
 "And in the church-yard cottage, I  
 "Dwell near them with my mother." (18-24)

The narrator recounts the child's inability to differentiate between life and death, but the child also situates the

graves of her siblings spatially close to her mother. In a later stanza, the little girl says that the graves are "Twelve steps or more from my mother's door" (39)--not exclusively her own door, but the door of her mother. Even though Wordsworth does not manifestly represent the child's mother in this poem, his peripheral representation is significant. The child repeatedly refers to her mother to help buttress her assertion that "we are seven" and to contradict the speaker's assertions that they number but five. She seems to use her bond with the mother to strengthen and even authorize her position against the questioner. The child may be imitating the maternal bond her mother retains with the dead brothers and sisters in the form of fraternal and sororal bonds, a bond Wordsworth represents more directly in poems like "The Emigrant Mother," "The Sailor's Mother," and "Maternal Grief." Whether or not Wordsworth intends for us to see the little girl as mimicking her mother is unknowable, but the child's repeated references to the mother do demonstrate the girl's use of the bond to bolster her rhetorical position against her questioner.<sup>25</sup>

The poem also implies that perhaps women and girls do not perceive their relationships with others in the same way as adult males. The male inquisitor focuses on individuation and separation from others in his calculations, while the girl emphasizes connection in hers, connection so powerful that separation by death and distance

are overcome.<sup>26</sup> While in this poem the mother is not represented as the figure who is longing for connection, the little girl's filial bond seems to energize her resistance to separation from her dead siblings. Just as Freud's grandson learned in his experiences with the spool and his mother in the fort/da game, absence does not necessarily mean death.<sup>27</sup> The lesson that children presumably learn about connection from the filial bond enables the girl to maintain relationships with her siblings whether they are distant or dead: even though mothers (or siblings) may be absent, they still exist and may be recalled through language. From a rational, empirical perspective the inquisitor's accounting may seem more accurate than the girl's, but because the man's interrogation is excessive, because his reasoning is so literal, and because the girl gets the last word in a five-line stanza that breaks the poem's four-line pattern, the girl's tabulation seems equally valid (figuratively, at least). Indeed, her sensibility appears to be more like the Poet's, who is "affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present" (Preface 49): she overcomes death/separation with figuration, story-telling.

In the previous "essays," Wordsworth makes the mother the central character; however, in this third essay, he relegates the mother to the margins. Separation and connection are still central issues as Wordsworth uses the child's perplexity at death to illustrate how the mind

operates, but in this instance, the mother has only a supporting role. Wordsworth seems to be gradually reducing the significance of the mother-child bond as a means to scrutinize the mind's fluxes and refluxes.

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In the fourth technique, Wordsworth asserts that he will follow the mind's shifting "by displaying the strength of fraternal, or to speak more philosophically, of moral attachment when early associated with great and beautiful objects of nature, as in *THE BROTHERS*" (43). In this poem, the mother is much less present than in the previous ones; however, Wordsworth does include several references to mothers that structure his treatment of the attachment issue. The narrator reveals that Leonard Ewbanks had to leave Ennerdale many years ago in order to earn money as a sailor to support himself and his brother James and that he has returned home to join his only brother. Leonard walks into a church-yard cemetery and finds what he believes is a new grave in the family plot, but then hopes "That it was not another grave, but one / He had forgotten" (87-88); he temporarily denies his permanent separation from his brother by rejecting physical evidence to the contrary. After the narrator's introduction, Leonard and the Priest engage in a dialogue in which Leonard withholds his identity but furtively inquires about the inhabitants of the graveyard, especially the new grave in his family's plot.

Leonard says that he is surprised that none of the graves are marked and suggests that "An orphan could not find his Mother's grave" because "neither head nor foot-stone, plate of brass" mark the graves (167-8). While the mother reference may at first seem incidental or inconsequential, Wordsworth's unusual editorial practice surrounding the line signals its significance. The reference was left out of the original 1800 edition of Lyrical Ballads even though it does appear in Dove Cottage Manuscript 174 prior to the 1800 edition. Further, the two lines also appear in the second errata sheet of the 1800 Lyrical Ballads and in all subsequent editions. Butler and Green indicate that the omission in the original could merely be "a copying error," but also suggest that it could have been excluded from the 1800 manuscript to Lyrical Ballads "out of delicacy for someone's feelings." They propose Thomas Poole, Coleridge's friend and patron in Nether Stowey who would have read the manuscript and who was caring for his invalid mother at home at the time (Note 167.148).

While both these conclusions are plausible, I believe that the elision and reinstatement are linked to the repeated anxiety we have seen Wordsworth show towards mothers in The Prelude and to the concerns with death, separation, and connection in relation to the mother as they occur in the Preface. Leonard has returned to this cemetery to determine if his brother is alive or dead, but he is

uncertain of his brother's whereabouts because the plots are not marked. Instead of simply revealing his mission to the Priest, he masks (or Wordsworth masks) his specific uncertainty by substituting an orphan's search for his mother for his own search for his brother. However, the issue Leonard raises (within the context of an orphan searching for a Mother's grave) is that there is no "type of our earthly state" or "emblem of our hopes" to represent the mother's past or future. He is concerned that there is nothing tangible to represent the mother after she has passed away. The Priest poses another possibility besides one practiced by the "Stone-cutters" to give the dead a sort of earthly immortality:

We have no need of names and epitaphs,  
 We talk about the dead by our fire-sides.  
 And then for our immortal part, we want  
 No symbols, Sir, to tell us that plain tale:  
 The thought of death sits easy on the man  
 Who has been born and dies among the mountains.  
(176-181)

The dead are given "second life" (183) through narrative. The living (at least those who are born and die "among the mountains") can remain connected to the dead through language, especially stories. While Wordsworth explores death in general and language as a means to bestow "second life," the original model he uses in this particular poem is the orphan in search of his mother's grave. His early elision of the mother reference covers over the source of a child's original experience of separation and frustration in trying to retain a connection with the dead mother, to find



a substitute for the absent mother and to mark it. However, by restoring the line, Wordsworth exposes his pattern of using a mother as a model to investigate the operation of the mind. He begins his treatment of attachments with a child's bond to his mother, but then generalizes his discussion to "fraternal" and then "moral" attachments. Once again, in order to analyze the mind, Wordsworth first relies on the mother-child relationship, but then generalizes his discussion beyond the mother.

In the action of the poem, mothers are also notable because of their explicit absence and because their roles are taken over by men. For example, Leonard and James are orphaned (their parents are in the graveyard too) at an early age, so their grandfather Walter raises them. He acts as a father and "half a mother" (233) to the brothers (like the title character of "Michael" [1800] who does "female service" [164] for his son). The Priest defines the grandfather's mothering role:

and if tears  
Shed when he talk'd of them where they were not,  
And hauntings from the infirmity of love  
Are aught of what makes up a mother's heart,  
This old Man in the day of his old age  
Was half a mother to them. (228-33)

The two qualities that the Priest suggests make up a mother's heart are shedding tears when talking of absent children and feeling haunted by "the infirmity of love" when they are absent. According to the Priest, the grandfather is like a mother because he is only comforted when he talks sadly of the boys while they are away from him and because

love makes him so vulnerable (to love's "infirmity") that he is haunted by their absence. This substitute mother possesses the same desire for connecting with the children that Betty Foy, the Mad Mother, and the Indian woman possessed. Separation causes all of them to talk "of [the children] where they were not" and to be "haunted" by images of them.

Certainly, Wordsworth examines the fraternal relationship in the bulk of the poem (his primary interest). However, he models the fraternal attachment after the mother-child attachment and precedes it with an allusion to the child's attachment to the mother and models it after this bond with the mother. Both James and Leonard, like their grandfather Walter, have "maternal hearts": they speak of each other when they are apart to relieve their separation, and they are both "haunted" by the "infirmity" of their love for each other. After Leonard leaves for the sea, James "droop'd and pin'd and pin'd" (336), and he also talked of his absent brother: "unless / His thoughts were turn'd on Leonard's luckless fortune, / He talked about him with a chearful love" (386-88). The Priest reveals that James even sought out Leonard in dreams; he formed unconscious narratives about reuniting with his brother: "often, rising from his bed at night, / He in his sleep would walk about, and sleeping / He sought his Brother Leonard" (347-49). In Leonard's case, the entire dialogue between himself and the Priest represents his story-making

to lessen his sadness at learning of his brother's death on seeing the new grave in the family plot. However, constructing this narrative is not enough to assuage "the weakness of his heart" completely (428); he still feels the "infirmity of love." By modeling the fraternal attachments after the mother-child attachment, Wordsworth suggests that the way the mind works to overcome separation within the context of "fraternal" or "moral" attachments is built upon the dynamic of separation and connection in the mother-child relationship; he models the fraternal heart after the "maternal heart."

Wordsworth's first two techniques offer feminine models of mothers who care for children, and in the third he presents a girl who seems to identify with her mother, but in the fourth method he at first refers to attachment or bonding as masculine, "fraternal," and then generalizes attachment with gender-free diction, "moral."<sup>28</sup> However, in all four he stresses the desire (or fantasy) of characters to unite or reunite with those who are separate in order to explore the "fluxes and refluxes of the mind." In all four examples Wordsworth presents relationships that emphasize both separation and connection simultaneously, within the context of motherhood. With the first technique, tracking maternal passions, he explicitly denotes maternal passion and defines it with examples in the poems: the mother longs passionately to connect with her child, to find the lost Johnny or merge with the infant. In the second means, death

in solitude, he considers extreme separation, but in the poem he concentrates on the mother's ultimate separation from her son, her desire to reunite with him, and the partial reconnection through fantasy. With the third method he investigates death/separation from a child's perspective, but in the sample poem he suggests that the child's bond with her mother energizes the child's insistence of connection with her dead and absent siblings. In the poems used to illustrate methods one and two, the characters long to overcome separation, but in the poem illustrating method three the child does not perceive the separation. Even though the mother is not an agent in "We Are Seven," she does reinforce the child's connection with her siblings: the child draws on the filial bond to reaffirm connection with the absent siblings. While in the fourth technique the sample poem contains no actual mothers, the elided line, "An orphan could not find his mother's grave," establishes the mother-child separation and attachment as the model for scrutinizing separation from and attachment to the dead. In addition, the attachment that Walter, Leonard, and James display may be classified as "fraternal" or "moral attachments, but these attachments are modeled after the Priest's description of the "maternal heart." More importantly, "The Brothers" follows the pattern of a desire for connection despite separation repeated in the previous methods as a means to explore the operation of the mind. Consequently, it appears that to examine the fluxes and

refluxes of the mind in Wordsworth's account is to observe the dynamic between desiring and accepting both separation and connection. This dynamic is modeled on the mother-child relation and then expanded by gradually distancing the dynamic's representation from the mother-child relationship although the mother is explicitly referred to in each technique. Eventually Wordsworth uses other human relationships to represent and define this separation/connection dynamic, but he repeatedly uses the mother-child relation as a model. While in The Prelude he shifts from the mother-child bond to the Nature-child relation to try to understand the poetic spirit, in this section of the Preface he gradually shifts from the mother-child bond to other human relationships to study the mind.

\*   \*   \*

Wordsworth's final means of analyzing the mind, placing the "Reader in the way of receiving from ordinary moral sensations another and more salutary impression than we are accustomed to receive from them," and the accompanying sample poem, "Simon Lee," do not follow the pattern established by the previous four quite so neatly. Separation and connection are a part of the means as illustrated by the poem, but there are no mothers presented, referred to, or suppressed through revisions. One reason why Wordsworth's final technique is so puzzling is because a definition of "ordinary moral sensation" is hard to come by. When we turn to the example poem for clarification,

Wordsworth presents us with Simon Lee, a man between the ages of seventy and eighty who used to be a great huntsman but who now is so old that he can barely work enough to provide for his wife and himself. The speaker takes care to present a pathetic creature, the "sole survivor" (24) of another time who is physically decrepit, childless, and poor; however, he contrasts the old Simon with the young Simon of the past whose hunting skills were unmatched:

No man like him the horn could sound,  
And no man was so full of glee  
To say the least, four counties round  
Had heard of Simon Lee. (17-20)

In the first eight stanzas the speaker mostly contrasts the strength and independence of the young Simon with the weakness and dependence of the old Simon when, in the ninth stanza, the speaker addresses the reader directly: "And I'm afraid that you expect / Some tale will be related" (71-72). With all the background on Simon's feats as a young hunter, Wordsworth seems to be preparing readers for a traditional tale of past adventure. However, he fails to meet the readers' expectations by indicating that he will not give them such a tale, but with what he will give them, "Perhaps a tale they'll make it" (80). Instead of adventure, the speaker relates an everyday incident in which Simon is working arduously at a "stump of rotten wood" trying to chop the "root of an old tree"--a task at which "[h]e might have worked for ever" (84-88). When the speaker offers to help Simon, the old huntsman consents, and the speaker severs the "tangled root" with "a single blow" (93-4). Simon's

response is intense; "tears into his eyes were brought," and "thanks and praises" ran from "his heart" so "fast that" the speaker thought "they never would have done" (96-100).

Wordsworth juxtaposes opposites concretely in the graphic description of the chopping of the root. The speaker's "severing" it with "a single blow" is a material act of separation; he separates the root from the "stump of rotten wood." However, this seemingly incidental separation leads to a connection of great magnitude between Simon and the speaker. Simon's gratitude leaves the speaker "mourning" (104) because he realizes how similar he is to Simon: the speaker will grow old and die as well. By recognizing the old man and interacting with him, the speaker beholds his own destiny which will undoubtedly be similar to but different from Simon's; like Simon, he will die, but he will also die individually, alone. As in the previous poems, Wordsworth represents one character who identifies with another, but here separation is represented graphically with the severed root and not as a plot element (one character separated from another).

While there is no mention of mothers in this poem (Simon and his wife Ruth have "no son" or "child" [29]), and while on the surface at least, the poem presents no separation or longing for connection by one person for another, separation and connection are indeed the keys to understanding the "more salutary impression" to "moral sensations." The old Simon has been separated from the man

he was: he used to be a skilled, independent, self-sufficient huntsman who was known throughout the land, but now he is a weak and dependent farmer whose former greatness is remembered only by the speaker. Despite these changes in status and power, he is still the same man. Displaying the speaker's identification with Simon (he too will become old and weak) and showing his resulting act of kindness by chopping the root is one way Wordsworth gives readers a feeling of sympathy for Simon, but developing these two opposites (strong Simon and weak Simon) and reminding readers that they represent the same person is how Wordsworth also gives readers "a more salutary impression than [they] are accustomed to receive from" moral sensations. The act of kindness is the catalyst for this dynamic, but the juxtaposition of opposites provides the source of energy.

As people age, the human mind may have a tendency to bias difference and separation in interpersonal relationships (as the inquisitor in "We are Seven" does), but by bringing the past and present together, Wordsworth stresses the similarity or connection between the young and old Simon. In all five techniques Wordsworth investigates the fluxes and refluxes of the mind by examining the separation of two distinct people/characters in the "essays" and the desire for connection of one with the other, yet in this poem he also presents the separation of a man in the prime of his powers from a man in his decline into weakness



and eventual death, while also reminding us that the distinctive figures are the same man, and that only the processes of time separate the two figures. The relationships regarded in the first four techniques are between characters in the poems, but the final technique also explores the relationship between the reader and the poem, and, more precisely, the reader's response when confronted with similarity in difference.<sup>29</sup>

\* \* \*

Wordsworth does not openly maintain that writing about maternal relationships is the only way to explore the workings of the mind. In practice, however, the first four methods are either directly associated with mothers or modeled after mother-child relationships: this repeated relationship becomes highly significant to his poetic theories. In all of these techniques, reconciling the paradox of connection in separation, or similitude in dissimilitude, seems to be the means of exploring the operation of the mind, an operation that Wordsworth expands beyond the mother with the progression of each technique and exemplary poem in his list. Along with his gradual movement beyond the mother, his erasure in 1836 of the paragraph that describes these five techniques suggests the same sort of anxiety that Wordsworth displays in his revisions of book two of The Prelude and in his addition of 1802 which describes the Poet. In effect, these revisions are an enactment of Wordsworth's own separation from the mother and

an acknowledgment of the qualities she represents, but at the same time they figure a retention of the importance of connection and an obscuring of the mother as the source for the qualities she represents. To treat the figure of the mother in poems is one thing, but to make her general importance explicit in the purpose of his poems expresses a dependence on the mother that might reduce the reader's perception of the poet's power and lessen the poet's distinction from others. Wordsworth repeatedly asserts the significance of what I have labeled a maternal dynamic, but he seems deliberately to obscure, or split off, the significance of the mother as a source for similitude in dissimilitude and as a means to understand the human mind.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter, I will refer to "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" as the Preface. Unless I note otherwise, my citations refer to the 1802 edition of the Preface from Paul M. Zall's Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth (38-62). When I refer to the 1800 or 1850 editions, I rely on Owen and Smyser's The Prose Works of William Wordsworth and cite these editions by date.

Influential full-length studies of Lyrical Ballads which I do not cite in my study include: Mary Jacobus's Tradition and Experiment in the Lyrical Ballads; John Jordan's Why the Lyrical Ballads?; Roger Murray's, Wordsworth's Style: Figures and Themes in the Lyrical Ballads of 1800; and Stephen Parrish's, The Art of the Lyrical Ballads.

<sup>2</sup>I use he because Wordsworth relies exclusively on masculine pronouns in his description of the Poet. In several of the quotations in this section I purposefully italicize the masculine nouns and pronouns to demonstrate how obtrusive they are; they are more prevalent in this section than in any other section of the Preface. The only feminine pronoun which occurs in the 1802 Preface is the she with which Wordsworth personifies poetry. Another stylistic irregularity I employ in this section is the capitalization

of Poet when I refer explicitly to the figure of the poet which Wordsworth describes.

<sup>3</sup> With his analogy, Wordsworth seems to make poetry and prose sisters, but this relationship is not drawn as clearly.

<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth critiques "personifications of abstract ideas" and poetic diction which is rife with "mechanical devices of style" in favor of language which is "near the language of men" (Zall 44-45). His particular target is Thomas Gray.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter two (28-31).

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Homans also associates the "mute dialogues" with Kristeva's "semiotic body language" (Bearing 42).

<sup>7</sup> The same passage from 1800 appears later in edition of 1802 and after (Zall 54, Owen 145).

<sup>8</sup> Wordsworth does say in "The Appendix to the Preface" that meter, historically, is at the root of the other artificial distinctions which have been added to poetic language, but it is a distinction which has led down the slippery slope of artificial distinctions:

It is indeed true, that the language of the earliest Poets was felt to differ materially from ordinary language, because it was the language of extraordinary occasions; but it was really spoken by men, language which the Poet himself had uttered when he had been affected by the events which he described, or which he had heard uttered by those around him. To this language it is probable that meter of some sort or other was early superadded. This separated the genuine language of Poetry still further from common life, so that whoever read or heard the poems of these earliest Poets felt himself moved in a way in which he had not been accustomed to be moved in real life, and by causes manifestly different from those which acted upon him in real life. This was the great temptation to all the corruptions which have followed; under the protection of this feeling succeeding Poets constructed a phraseology which had one thing, it is true, in common with the genuine language of poetry, namely, that it was not heard in ordinary conversation; that it was unusual. But the first Poets, as I have said, spake a language which, though unusual, was still the language of men. This circumstance, however, was disregarded by their successors; they found

that they could please by easier means; they became proud modes of expression which they themselves had invented, and which were uttered only by themselves. In process of time metre became a symbol or promise of this unusual language, and whoever took upon him to write in metre, according as he possessed more or less of true poetic genius, introduced less or more of this adulterated phraseology into his composition, and the true and the false were inseparably interwoven until, the taste of men becoming gradually perverted, this language was received as natural language; and at length, by the influence of books upon men, did to a certain degree really become so. (161)

<sup>9</sup> Derek Attridge notes that this selection implies "only a subtraction from nature [natural language]," a subtraction which removes the impurities (vulgarities and meanness) from natural language (72).

<sup>10</sup> For the original quotation see Patton's edition of The Watchman (139).

<sup>11</sup> This feminine man calls to mind Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling (1771) and the effeminized judgment which many of its followers received. I am greatly indebted to Susan J. Wolfson's "Lyrical Ballads and the Language of (Men) Feeling" for making this connection and for help in understanding the traditional associations of femininity with feeling. See especially 32-34.

<sup>12</sup> Judith W. Page concurs that in the Preface Wordsworth might have used "so much rhetorical energy" distancing himself "from the feminine in art and culture because he knew that his subject matter (forsaken women, mad mothers, and other marginalized figures)" along with "his reverence for emotion would in fact associate him with women and with women writers" (38).

<sup>13</sup> Critics tend to attend only to poems in which Wordsworth attributes traditionally "feminine" qualities to male characters while ignoring those in which he attributes traditionally "masculine" qualities to female characters. See Alan Richardson's "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine" in Mellor's Romanticism and Feminism for an alternative reading of Wordsworth's "appropriation." Richardson views only the appropriation of feminine qualities of sensibility by masculine poets and does not treat the instances in which poets bestow traditionally masculine qualities on female characters.

<sup>14</sup> Diane Long Hoeveler discusses androgyny and romantic literature in Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within. See also Kurt Weil's Androgyny and the Denial of Difference.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfson marks the concern in the Lyrical Ballads "that a possession by feeling may effeminize men, eroding the social figure of manliness that depends on clear gender difference" (30-31).

<sup>16</sup> Wolfson indicates that in Wordsworth's repeated insistence that the Poet's task is to give pleasure, "reader's could be reminded of ideals of female conduct; as Hannah More asserted in her immensely popular Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799), women have a 'natural desire to please' (2:144)" (31).

<sup>17</sup> Many critics have associated this moment in the Preface with Keats's definition of Negative Capability in the December 21 or 27, 1817 letter to his brothers Tom and George: "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (191-94).

<sup>18</sup> See chapter two (61).

<sup>19</sup> My primary text of poems from Lyrical Ballads is Butler and Green's volume from the Cornell Wordsworth series; I refer to line numbers parenthetically. This text includes references to all subsequent variations.

<sup>20</sup> After nearly equating the Poet with the man, Wordsworth selects a very appropriate figure to describe the relationship between man and nature--a mirror. He says, the poet "considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature" (52). The mind is not a regular mirror which reflects back an exact image, but a selective mirror that reflects back only "the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature;" just as in The Prelude, the mind is "creator and receiver both."

<sup>21</sup> Previously, he had contrasted the Poet to the Biographer and Historian (50) in a similar way. These social scientists (just as with the a lawyer, physician, mariner, astronomer, and natural philosopher that Wordsworth mentions) must be much more concerned with the "fidelity" of their description than the Poet because they write to human beings to impart information or to explain concepts which may require special background "information." The Poet's aim is different, for he writes to give "immediate pleasure to a human Being. . . as a Man." The Poet writes to humankind while the social scientist writes to the individual.

<sup>22</sup> Wordsworth changed the title of "The Mad Mother" to "Her Eyes Are Wild" in 1831. I discuss this poem more completely in chapter four.

<sup>23</sup> There are some minor revisions to this paragraph after 1802 (See Owen and Smyser), but there are no substantial revisions that alter the tenor of the text until the passage is deleted in 1836.

<sup>24</sup> I analyze "The Mad Mother" in much greater depth in chapter four of this study. Wordsworth deleted the title in his 1815, two-volume Poems and in subsequent editions up to 1827. Joseph Hine first titled the poem "Her Eyes Are Wild" in 1831 in Selections from the Poems of William Wordsworth; Wordsworth adopted this title in his 1836, six-volume Poetical Works.

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Hartman comments on the juxtaposition of birth and death in this scene: they seem to occupy what is virtually the same place, so that the danger of never reaching self-consciousness, or a significant separation of imagination from nature, is felt. Yet the memory of this instinctive resistance to the cognate thoughts of separation and selfhood is precisely what sustains the man who knows he has been strong in and against imagination (Wordsworth's Poetry 146).

Without using the word, Hartman also recognizes the significance of connection ("resistance to . . . separation") as it relates to imagination.

<sup>26</sup> Nancy Chodorow makes a similar argument as it applies boys' and girls' relationships with their mothers in The Reproduction of Mothering. Briefly, she argues that boys tend to seek greater separation from their mothers while girls tend to identify with them longer.

<sup>27</sup> See Beyond the Pleasure Principle for more on Freud's fort/da game (14-17).

<sup>28</sup> In her influential instruction book The Mothers of England; Their Influence and Responsibility (1841), Sarah Stickney Ellis views mothers as the source of moral instruction for all children: "all public and private gentlemen, as well as men of business, mechanics and laborers of every description, will have received, as regards intellectual and moral character, their first bias, and often their strongest and their last from the training and the influence of a mother" (17-18).

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Parrish aptly reminds us that "Wordsworth's poetic tactics and his critical pronouncements taken together make it clear that poet and reader are joint participants in the experience of literature" (32). The fifth technique obviously emphasizes this fact.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE DANGER OF A MOTHER'S VOICE: OVER-IDENTIFICATION**  
**AND "HER EYES ARE WILD"**

It will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he described, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs.

"Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1802)

The mother must realize that the baby is not actually her possession, and that, though he is so small and utterly dependent on her help, he is a separate entity and ought to be treated as an individual human being; she must not tie him too much to herself, but assist him to grow up to independence. The earlier she can take up this attitude the better; she will thus not only help the child, but preserve herself from future disappointment.

Melanie Klein, "Weaning"

In chapter two I discussed the "blessed babe's" early relationship with his mother as Wordsworth describes it in the 1805 and 1850 versions of The Prelude: in the 1805 version the child recognizes the mother as a separate subject, but in 1850 he views her as more of an object. I further argued that in the 1805 edition Wordsworth gradually progresses from representing the child's recognition of the mother as subject to a recognition of a personified mothering Nature who is like a subject. Similarly, Wordsworth initially associates the poetic spirit, the powers of "creator and receiver both," with the mother, but then he transfers his association to a mothering Nature. I argued that for Wordsworth the receptive and creative powers of the imagination are derived first from the relation with



the mother and then are displaced to become the relation with Nature.

In chapter three I examined the "maternal" dynamic of "similitude in dissimilitude," the paradoxical balance of separation and differentiation that Wordsworth discusses in "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" and that he says leads to "poetic pleasure." I argued that this dynamic, which is rooted in the early mother-child experience of recognition, structures much of Wordsworth's poetic theory even though he splits off explicit associations with the mother as he revises the Preface.

Reading the mother as a subject has been problematic in those chapters because the perspective that I have offered has been mostly that of an outside, adult observer and also the child. An infant-centered reading tends to view the mother's and infant's positions as reciprocal: the assumption is that mother and child behave the same way or articulate the same language activity in early experiences of intense identification or merger. To understand Wordsworth's concept of the mother as a subject, we would want the poem to represent the action from the mother's point of view or at least to grant the mother a voice.

In the following chapter I will examine "Her Eyes Are Wild" (originally titled "The Mad Mother" [1798]), a poem that represents an early mother-infant relationship with a mother's voice but which is framed by an outside balladeer's or narrator's perspective.<sup>1</sup> Using Wordsworth's term in "The

Advertisement to the Lyrical Ballads" (1798), I read this poem as an "experiment" with a mother's voice. I will examine the dynamic of separation and identification as Wordsworth portrays it in the balladeer-mother and the mother-infant dyads. In early editions Wordsworth represents both the balladeer and mother losing the balance of similitude in dissimilitude and merging with the other, but in later editions he marks the balladeer's balance while the mother remains unbalanced. Over time, Wordsworth's revisions gradually separate the balladeer's voice from the mother's, and he more carefully marks them as separate entities. The mother whom Wordsworth depicts gradually loses a separate sense of self; because of her abandonment by and separation from her husband, she becomes obsessed with connection/identification with her son. She does not experience the "being with" of simultaneous separation and connection with her son (as the blessed babe of The Prelude does), but attempts to merge his identity with hers through extreme identification and projection. Consequently, her voice becomes one of "similitude" without "dissimilitude," of identification without separation. Her voice does not become incomprehensible, but its heightened rhythm, rhyme, and musicality represents the mother's shift to greater semiotic activity which disrupts meaning.<sup>2</sup> As Kristeva argues, semiotic activity is rooted in an infant's relationship with its mother, and it is a result of a child's having only a minuscule awareness of difference from

the mother. It follows then, that if a mother loses her awareness of difference, and she over-identifies with her infant's position (whose language is more semiotic), then her voice would become more semiotic as well.<sup>3</sup> In my discussions of The Prelude and the Preface, I have shown how poetry itself is more semiotic than practical language; it is more rhythmic, rhyming, musical, and disruptive. However, semiotic activity dominates the mother's discourse in this poem: the rhythm and rhyme are the most regular of all the Lyrical Ballads, it is classified as and reads as a song, and the way the mother's voice shifts disrupts meaning.

With the contrast of the balladeer's and mother's voices, Wordsworth explores the dangers of too much connection, of grounding one's identity in relation to another and not maintaining balance. With the mother's voice he imagines the psychological and linguistic consequences of over-identification: psychosis and what we might call semiosis--a voice in which semiotic activity (rhythm, rhyme, musicality, and disruption of meaning) predominates. Here Wordsworth explores what might happen when a poet over-identifies with his subject: a poem without boundaries and or stable meaning. However, with the narrator's voice Wordsworth provides another alternative; he has the ability to maintain balance, to identify with the

other, but at the same time to maintain a self-awareness, and he thus provides a much more stable, poetic voice.

**The Frame of the Mother's Song: Identification,  
Voice, and the Balladeer**

I will discuss identification in two ways in this chapter: Wordsworth's practice of "poetic identification" as a writer and the way that he represents characters (especially the mother and the narrating balladeer) as identifying with one another. Generally speaking, identification is the process by which a person's self-representation (perception of self) is modified to become more like the perceived representation of another (i.e., Mom likes books; I like books too). A smaller part of the process of identification is the ability to place one's self imaginatively in the position of others (to walk in their shoes) without necessarily altering one's self-representation. Identification is a central part of children's development as they continue to alter their self-images with greater facility, and it continues into adulthood.<sup>4</sup>

As I revealed in the previous chapter, Wordsworth explains a sort of "poetic identification" as one of the major tenets of his poetics in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" even though he does not explicitly associate this process with the mother-infant bond in his poetic theory. He writes,

it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he described, nay, for short spaces of time perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs. (1802.49)

Wordsworth overtly displays the process of poetic identification in several poems of Lyrical Ballads with narrators/balladeers who identify with characters they observe. The most obvious example is "The Pet-lamb" (1800) in which the balladeer observes a young girl feeding her lamb and says, "If Nature to her tongue could measur'd numbers bring / Thus, thought I, to her Lamb that little Maid would sing" (19-20).<sup>5</sup> The narrator constructs the girl's song as he thinks she would sing in verse if she could: he adopts his perception of her voice as his own. He identifies with her, but maintains distance by adding verse.<sup>6</sup> However, after singing the song proper, the balladeer confesses,

As homeward through the land I went with lazy feet  
This song to myself did I oftentimes repeat,  
And it seem'd as I retrac'd the ballad line by  
line  
That but half of it was hers, and one half of it  
was mine.

Again, and once again did I repeat the song,  
"Nay" said I, "more than half to the Damsel must  
belong,  
For she look'd with such a look, and she spake  
with such a tone,  
That I almost receiv'd her heart into my own."  
(61-68)

At first the balladeer thinks that half the song is the girl's and half is his own, but after singing it repeatedly, he believes that most of the song ("more than half")

belongs to the girl. He believes that he has so identified with her ("‘I almost receiv’d her heart into my own’") that the song is more hers than his.

The poetic identification that Wordsworth displays in "Her Eyes Are Wild" is not as self-evident as in "The Pet-Lamb." He opens the poem with a balladeer who describes an unusual woman. The balladeer says the woman's "eyes are wild" and that she has "burnt . . . coal-black hair" and "rusty-stain[ed]" eyebrows (1-3).<sup>7</sup> The narrator emphasizes her otherness by revealing that she came "far from over the main" and is "alone" except for "a baby on her arm" (4-6). After constructing this woman as alien, the balladeer proceeds to situate her in a rural setting and reveals what she does:

And underneath the hay-stack warm,  
And on the green-wood stone,  
She talked and sung the woods among;  
And it was in the English tongue. (7-10)

Wordsworth's description makes her more familiar to readers in that she is located in a common setting and also in that she speaks English. This familiarization makes her especially interesting because it balances out the otherness the balladeer characterizes in the opening lines: she becomes almost a figure of "similitude in dissimilitude," a figure the audience can identify with but who is also strange and different.

Wordsworth himself comments on the significance of the woman's separateness and also his emphasis on "the English

tongue" as a means of identification in the poem. In a letter to John Kenyon on September 24, 1836, he writes:

though she came from far, English was her native tongue--which shows her either to be of these Islands [Great Britain], or a North American. On the later supposition, while the distance removes her from us, the fact of her speaking our language brings us at once into closer sympathy with her. (Later Years 3.293)

Even though the balladeer describes the woman as coming from a distant place, Wordsworth indicates that readers will "sympath[ize]" or identify with her because both speak the same language. Especially because of the way Wordsworth characterizes her in the opening stanza through his balladeer, she is a figure of similitude in dissimilitude.

However, the opening stanza suggests an identification beyond the one between the woman and the audience, and includes an identification between the balladeer and the woman. Like the woman the balladeer is apparently a singer as the musical structure and meter of the opening stanza suggest. Like the woman, the balladeer also sings his songs in English. Further, if he cannot place himself in her position, and identify with her situation, it seems unlikely that he would bother to sing her song, to tell her story.

In the second stanza, in which the mother's song, introduced by quotation marks, begins, the balladeer, at one level, seems to adopt the mother's voice as his own, to lose his voice in her voice (most notably in early editions), but at another level, Wordsworth displays the two voices as completely separate. In fact, the way he constructs the

relationship between the poem's narrator/balladeer who speaks/sings directly in the opening stanza and the mother whose song the balladeer actually sings suggests a strong differentiation between the voices; Wordsworth distinguishes them to the degree that he seems to represent two distinct characters who are speaking instead of one character singing the song of the other.

He marks this separation between narrator and mother in several ways. First, the metrical pattern of the first stanza differs from the remaining nine stanzas of the mother's song. All of the feet in the poem are generally iambic, but the number of feet in the lines varies. The first stanza has four lines of tetrameter, is followed by two sets of tetrameter-hexameter couplets, and concludes with two lines of tetrameter. The mother's nine-stanza song (except for the last two lines) is made up of ten-line stanzas of iambic tetrameter. Giving each "voice" his/her own meter is one subtle way to distinguish between the "characters" and to suggest their separation/difference. Along with the change in meter, Wordsworth also marks the characters' separation by shifting from third person pronouns in the first stanza to first person pronouns in the remaining stanzas; he switches from a voice of an observer to that of the mother.

Nonetheless, Wordsworth most clearly delineates between these two voices with quotation marks at the beginning of the second stanza. This punctuation seems to mark the move



from one character, the narrator, to another, the mother in a the dramatic fashion of a play script. However, in other ballads in the collection, Wordsworth marks distinct voices in play-script form as in "The Brothers" or omits quotation marks as with the narrator and Andrew in "The Oak and the Broom" and the narrator and the shepherd in "'Tis said that some have died for love." The narrator does not indicate that he directly overhears the mother's song and writes it down for readers as the Vicar does in Ellen's story in book six of The Excursion when he notes that he reconstructs the abandoned woman's story from words on a "Valentine" (892-93) and a song Ellen's mother overheard her singing (917). What we have in "Her Eyes Are Wild" is a balladeer who reconstructs the mother's song, a balladeer who shapes the mother's song to fit the conventions of verse. Wordsworth presents two voices in the poem, but the narrator's voice which frames the poems takes on the mother's voice.

Wordsworth marks the shift from first to second stanza meticulously, but by the poem's end, his narrator (in early editions) appears to have made the mother's voice his own because he does not close off the mother's song with quotations.<sup>8</sup> The effect is that the balladeer who has been singing the mother's song seems to be overwhelmed by the song he has been singing. Susan Wolfson argues that this lack of punctuation in the poem yields

a sense of its poet's inability to distance himself from the spell of the song that he rehearses. He may have so absorbed her voice and

sensibility into his own that he can no longer contain and punctuate it as other. (46)

In other words, Wordsworth's balladeer has so identified himself with the mother that by the end of the poem, he is unable to demarcate their separation with the closing punctuation; the balladeer's identity is unstable and based on relation with the mother and his ability to sing her song.

But why put so much stock in a pair of quotation marks?<sup>9</sup> After all, in 1805 Wordsworth eventually does close off the poem in the two-volume Lyrical Ballads with Pastoral and other Poems, by W. Wordsworth, so that the absent quotation marks may appear to be simply a printing error or an oversight on his own part. While this conclusion is possible, Wordsworth published two new editions of Lyrical Ballads in 1800 and 1802. He was a scrupulous editor of his works, and with "Her Eyes Are Wild" in particular, he made subtle punctuation changes in both the 1800 and 1802 editions without adding the closing punctuation.<sup>10</sup> In light of his meticulous editorial practice, and the fact that two editions of the poem were published before adding the quotation marks, it seems reasonable to speculate that he might have followed the unconventional punctuation for a particular reason, as a part of his experiment with identification which he so openly enacts in the mother's song. However, whether intended or not, the absent closing quotation marks do function to blur the separation between

the balladeer and mother--a blurring that has caused more than one critic to consider the poem as having only one voice (the mother's) and to slight the significance of the narrator.<sup>11</sup>

But what can we make of this revision? I think Wordsworth's later addition of quotation marks follows the characteristic anxiety we have seen him display in revisions of The Prelude and the Preface. By making the separation between balladeer and mother more distinct, he distances his balladeer/poet from the mother. If we rely on texts after 1805, Wordsworth makes other changes which mark the distinction between balladeer and mother more insistently: in the 1832 Poetical Works, he adds quotation marks to the beginning of stanza ten which further remind readers that the balladeer has been singing the mother's song,<sup>12</sup> and in the 1836 Poetical Works, he adds stanza numbers at the beginning of each stanza which remind readers that they are reading the mother's song as it has been filtered through the voice of a narrator. In light of the progressive separation, the earlier punctuation represents a more experimental Wordsworth who is willing to construct his balladeer as directly identifying with a mother figure, to display his poetic identification in action, and to cross a border without returning. The danger of such a move is that Wordsworth sacrifices the balladeer's voice in early editions and allows it to be subsumed by the mother's voice.

The mediating figure (the balladeer) whom Wordsworth constructs to stand between a reality (the mother's singing of her song) and a representation of reality (the balladeer replaying her song) is engulfed, and the poem is left open-ended and uncertain. The later revisions represent a Wordsworth who still wants to explore extreme identification, but who wants to stabilize the frame of that experiment to create a greater feeling of dissimilitude for readers of the poem.

### **Psychosis, Semiosis, and the Mother's Song of Uncertainty**

Aside from the general and poetic identification which Wordsworth represents in the balladeer's identification with the mother, he places a particular type of identification at the poem's center: the mother's identification with her baby. Most often, psychoanalytic theorists and developmental psychologists have focused on the importance of identification for children in the mother-child bond, but recently they have begun to examine more closely the significance of mothers' identifications with their children on the mothers' feelings, actions, interpretations, and interpersonal relations.<sup>13</sup> As in my discussion of The Prelude in chapter two, in this chapter I use contemporary psychoanalytic theory as a tool with which to examine Wordsworth's portrayal of the mother-infant dyad except that in this instance I view the dyad from the mother's perspective. I utilize theory not simply to make a

correlation between Wordsworth's observations almost two centuries ago and the psychological theories of today, but to use a more precise vocabulary, different from Wordsworth's, to understand his representation of the mother's experience. I will show how the mother's over-identification affects the language the mother uses, at least the language Wordsworth depicts her as using. Before returning to the mother's song in "Her Eyes Are Wild," I will offer some general background on mothers' identifications with their children.

Melanie Klein was probably the first clinician to examine the mother-infant dyad from the mother's perspective. In her influential essay "Love, Guilt and Reparation" (1937) Klein examines the dyad very generally in terms of identification. She says that after the infant is born, the mother is "capable of putting herself in the child's place and of looking at the situation from his point of view" ("Love" 318).<sup>14</sup> Her ability to identify with the child is bound up in "feelings of guilt and the drive for reparation"; she experiences guilt for the aggressive feelings she had as an infant towards her own mother and tries to compensate for these feelings by sacrificing herself for her child. Both child and mother benefit from this situation: the child's development is furthered, and the mother gets satisfaction in either "doing what her mother did for her" or "doing what she wished her mother to do" (319). The mother gains satisfaction not only by

identifying with her baby's position, but also by identifying with her own mother's position. However, Klein warns, in some cases the mother's identification with her child may be "over-strong" and the child may become "the centre of her life"; if this occurs, the mother cannot participate in other relationships because of her over-identification with the child. The mother fails to separate from her child.<sup>15</sup> This kind of over-identification appears to be the kind of relationship Wordsworth constructs in "Her Eyes Are Wild."

Daniel Stern expands the significance of a natural identificatory phase and characterizes it more generally as one of four themes in the psychic organization he calls the motherhood constellation, "the dominant organizing axis for the mother's psychic life . . . [which] pushes to the side the previous nuclear organizations or complexes that have played that central role" (Motherhood 171).<sup>16</sup> Stern characterizes a primary relatedness theme that concerns the mother's "social-emotional engagement with the baby" and includes "the forms of relationship that occupy the first year or so of the infant's life before speech" (176). Primary relatedness includes such issues as "attachment, security, and affection, the regulation of the baby's rhythms, the 'holding' of the baby, and the induction of and instruction in the basic rules of human relatedness that are carried out preverbally" (176). Like Klein, Stern notices

the importance of this early identification for the child's development, but his formulation is much more mother-centered because he focuses precisely on the mother's attitudes and behaviors in this relationship, and he does not characterize the identification as an undifferentiated state of merger in which mother and child completely lose their awareness of boundaries, of their senses of self. In "normal, healthy" interactions, these intense moments are moments of "being with."<sup>17</sup> Stern's formulation is useful because even though it is based on empirical study and is thus more persuasive, it is not the kind of relationship Wordsworth depicts in the mother-child relationship in this poem. Stern's formulation provides a point of contrast for the type of mother-infant bond Wordsworth portrays in "Her Eyes Are Wild" because in this instance, the mother, ultimately, does not accept her child's separateness.

A complementary way that mothers may blur the representation of self and child is in the way they project their own anxieties and fears onto their children. Projection is very similar to identification but functions in the opposite direction: in identification, a person's self-representation is modified to become more like the representation of another; however, in projection, a person's representation of another is modified to become more like one's own self-representation. In both cases, the effect is to make representations of self and other similar. More specifically, in instances where mothers project their

feelings onto babies, they make their representations of their children more like their self-representations (i.e., "I feel sick; my baby looks/is sick"), while in instances of identification, mothers make their self-representations more like their representations of their children (i.e., "My baby is sick; I feel sick"). Both these processes are fundamental methods for constructing senses of self.

Breast-feeding is a particular behavior that developmental psychologists have emphasized in the interaction between mothers and infants and which they have associated with identification, and it is one of the most graphic actions that Wordsworth depicts in "Her Eyes Are Wild."<sup>18</sup> Many psychoanalytic theorists have noted the significance of breast-feeding for identification; however, generally speaking, they have examined its significance from the child's perspective. For example, Klein views the child's relationship with the mother's breast as the key to understanding his earliest mental activity ("phantasy-building") and argues that this relationship is the foundation for later, more complex mental activity.<sup>19</sup> Klein's comments on the mother's experience of breast-feeding are mostly cautionary. She says that the mother's "pleasure" in breast-feeding is essential in leading "to a full emotional understanding between mother and child" ("Weaning" 300), but at the same time, she warns that the mother "must realize that the baby is not actually her possession" and that he is a "separate entity"; furthermore,



"she must not tie him too much to herself, but assist him to grow up to independence" (301). She must not become "passionately excited by any of her activities in tending the child" because her "lack of self-control" may be experienced by the child as a sort of "seduction, and this would set up undue complications in his development" (301). Even though Klein is primarily concerned with childhood development and not the mother's position, she does recognize the possible effects of identification on the mother. The mother's emotional bond with her child must be very close, and yet if she forgets that he is a "separate entity," the relationship can become dangerous: the child may not develop a sense of self and the mother will experience "future disappointment" ("Weaning" 300). Again, close identification through breast-feeding is important, so long as it is not too close.<sup>20</sup>

Other writers carry this identification in breast-feeding even further, noting that in some occurrences of nursing the mother may experience the child as a part of herself. If boundaries collapse and the child is experienced as part of the self, then, according to Stephanie Demetrakopoulos, a sort of pure identification occurs, "a blend of psychic and bodily unification." She argues for this pure identification as a positive, healthy experience, and says that "As the mother lets go of her ego [during breast-feeding], identifying instead with the baby's satisfaction, she may feel a sense of total unity with the

child" (432).<sup>21</sup> Demetrakopolous adopts a myth of fusion or merger between the mother and child that accounts for the identificatory bond as "an absence of boundaries" in which mother and child lose sight of self and other, in which they imaginatively blend together.

Daniel Stern argues more persuasively, however, that this presumed merger is actually a healthy experience of "being with" another. During such an event, the sense of a core self is never ruptured and the other is still perceived as other. The core self is related with but not actually fused with the other.<sup>22</sup> In "Her Eyes Are Wild" Wordsworth represents the mother as retaining a degree of separateness in the bond of nursing; however, when the child physically breaks the bond, the mother longs for a sort of complete merger.

\*   \*   \*

"Her Eyes Are Wild" tangibly represents part of the mother-child identification or "emotional understanding" through breast-feeding from the mother's perspective. At some points, Wordsworth portrays the mother as recognizing that her child is different from her and has different desires from hers, but for the most part he constructs her as so closely bonded that she has difficulty recognizing external reality as it differs from her internal reality. So long as she can retain the balance, the identification is one of "being with," of also maintaining a feeling of difference. However, by the poem's close, she appears to

have lost her sense of an external reality and refuses to accept separation from her child; when confronted by the reality of the child's separateness, she escapes further into the wilderness, away from society where difference might be imposed on her. With this "experiment," Wordsworth explores a mother's position and voice and suggests that without a balance of similitude in dissimilitude in a mother-child relationship, the result is psychosis and semiosis: extreme mental and linguistic instability. We also see Wordsworth's ambivalence toward representing a mother's voice, his simultaneous attraction to her powers of identification with her child but also his fear of the consequences of such identification if it becomes too extreme.<sup>23</sup>

The mother begins her narrative on breast-feeding in a seemingly deluded state by discussing the three "fiendish faces" (23) that at one time "Hung at [her] breast" (24). She shifts from the feelings of the "fire" and "dull pain" (21-2) associated with these fiends to the "sight of joy" which did her "good" (25-6) when she sees her son:

My little boy of flesh and blood;  
Oh joy for me that sight to see!  
For he was here, and only he. (28-30)

Initially, Wordsworth represents her as having a fantasy of being devoured by the "fiends," (perhaps being incorporated by her child), yet when she "wake[s]" from the dream-state, she relishes the actual son "of flesh and blood." She does not fail to see him, in Klein's terms, as a "separate

entity": "he was here, and only he."<sup>24</sup> Without some awareness of her son's separateness, the mother could not speak about him; he would become (in her mind) simply an extension of herself or a fiendish vampire.

In stanza four, the mother continues to experience her child as a separate "babe" connected with her in breast-feeding, but gradually the experience becomes more like a merger:

Suck, little babe, oh suck again!  
 It cools my blood; it cools my brain;  
 Thy lips I feel them, baby! they  
 Draw from my heart the pain away.  
 Oh! press me with thy little hand;  
 It loosens something at my chest;  
 About that tight and deadly band  
 I feel thy little fingers press'd.  
 The breeze I see is in the tree;  
 It comes to cool my babe and me. (31-40)

As the mother and child materially connect, the physical and psychological boundaries seem to collapse. From a unified "babe" (31), she fragments the external child into "lips" (33), "hand" (35), and "fingers" (38) which satisfy her wishes as she fragments herself into "blood," "brain" (32), and "heart" (34). Her blood is cooled as the baby drinks in her warm milk. The hand "loosens something at" her chest as the child's stomach is filled. She recognizes the child's difference, but she does not appear to view him as unified. The final two lines suggest a merger of internal and external worlds. Although the lines seem to be a non-sequitur, they represent the mother's blurring her psychic state with her representation of reality: breast-feeding

cools her, but she sees Nature's forces contributing to this cooling effect as well. She projects the cooling she experiences onto the natural scene.

Coleridge comments extensively and perceptively on the significance of these two lines in chapter twelve of Biographia Literaria, characterizing them as:

so expressive of that deranged state, in which from the increased sensibility the sufferer's attention is abruptly drawn off by every trifle, and in the same instant plucked back again by the one despotic thought, and bringing home with it, by the blending, fusing power of Imagination and Passion, the alien object to which it had been so abruptly diverted, no longer an alien but an ally and an inmate. (7.2 150)

What at first seems like a distraction (the tree) which breaks the mother's intense connection with her child is fused with the mother's original concern (cooling and connecting). She associates her cooling in breast-feeding with the cooling of the breeze which she expressly says, "comes to cool my babe and me." Her internal experience seems to merge with the external world.

Along with the mother's extreme identification with her child, this stanza also illustrates the extreme regularity of the meter and rhyme of almost all of her song (the semiotic qualities). Unlike the balladeer's stanza (which Wordsworth constructs with iambic feet in four lines of tetrameter, followed by two sets of tetrameter-hexameter couplets, and concluding with two lines of tetrameter), Wordsworth composes the mother's nine-stanza song very regularly in ten-line stanzas of iambic tetrameter (except

for the last two lines of stanza ten which I will discuss later). Further, he scores the rhyme scheme consistently throughout the mother's song (A A B B C D C D E E), and each line rhymes with one other (again, except for the poem's final two lines). No other poem in the 1798 Lyrical Ballads is so regular. Wordsworth varies stanzas of other poems by altering the meter of a line as in "Anecdote for Fathers" which he constructs in stanzas with three lines of tetrameter and one line of hexameter. He also constructs stanzas in which some end-words do not have a word with which to rhyme as in "The Thorn" (A B C B D E F F E G G). He writes still other poems which include stanzas irregular in length as in "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree" or which are written in blank verse as in "Tintern Abbey." I believe the extreme regularity of the mother's song might be a function of the over-identification Wordsworth depicts her as having with her child. Its almost incantatory quality resembles the semiotic activity that Kristeva claims is rooted in the early mother-infant dyad.<sup>25</sup> Wordsworth does not depict her voice as completely semiotic (this would be impossible), but he does fashion it as more semiotic than any of the other voices in his collection.

Wordsworth further represents the mother's extreme identification with her child in the way she experiences bodily pleasure (in the cessation of her pain) as completely one-sided. She seems to experience the "passionate excitement" and "lack of self-control" that Klein warns

mothers against (301). Indeed, in the next stanza, she tells her son to "love me, love me, little boy! / Thou art thy mother's only joy" (41-42) which makes this encounter resemble a kind of incestuous "seduction" (Klein 301). Wordsworth does not represent the mother's awareness of the child's experience of breast-feeding, the child's pleasure "when his mouth is stimulated by sucking at his mother's breast" and "when the warm stream of milk . . . fills the stomach" (Klein 290). While she experiences relief in the milk being loosened and "drawn" from her, she does not seem aware of the child's mutual satisfaction as the milk fills his stomach. Wordsworth does not depict the mother as experiencing a moment of, in Stern's terms, "being with." In effect, the child becomes a sort of narcissistic extension of the mother.

However, the mother has not lost all sense of the child's difference. In the next stanza, she seems to identify with her son in the way she characterizes their mutually dependent relationship: she and her son are interdependent for their common survival. This mutual dependence most clearly represents the mother's identification with her child. In the fifth stanza, the song breaks from the description of breast-feeding to the mother's longing for her child to love her and is followed by a sort of suicidal ejaculation:

Oh! love me, love me, little boy!  
 Thou art thy mother's only joy;  
 And do not dread the waves below,

When o'er the sea-rock's edge we go;  
 The high crag cannot work me harm,  
 Nor leaping torrents when they howl. (41-46)

She seems ready to throw herself and her child off a cliff,  
 but then she stops herself for the babe's sake:

The babe I carry on my arm,  
 He saves for me my precious soul;  
 Then happy lie; for blest am I;  
 Without me my sweet babe would die. (47-50)

By stopping herself for his sake, she also saves her own soul: she will not commit, within a Christian context, the unpardonable sin of suicide. By the mother's logic, the child saves the mother because she must remain alive to protect and provide for the son. In a paradoxical way, this mother identifies herself as the savior of her son whom she perceives as her own savior. The son saves the mother--"He saves for me my precious soul"--but she also saves her son--"Without me my sweet babe would die."

However, Wordsworth represents the mother's reassurances that her child should not fear her with a certain ambivalence. Masked behind her reassurances are threats. She has already told him not to fear her and that she will not hurt him: "I pray thee have no fear of me" (15). These seem odd words of comfort for a mother to give her child: to tell a child not to be afraid is one thing, but to tell a child not to be afraid of his own mother is rather odd. The mother seems to fear that the child will not continue to love her ("Oh! love me, love me little boy" [41]), and she subtly suggests that if he does not continue



to love her, he may pay the consequences: "oe'r the sea-rock's edge we go" (44). Wordsworth may portray the mother's threat as being caused by her identification with her child whom she perceives as threatening her: he may harm her (as her husband did) by leaving her, so she may harm him too. But, again, love is also bound with this aggression. Wordsworth portrays her as identifying with her perception of the child's role as her savior: "He saves for me my precious soul" and "Without me my sweet babe would die"; she says, in effect, "he saves me, but I save him." This ambivalence may be Wordsworth's projection of the ambivalence he himself exhibits when in early editions of his works he values the mother and makes her significance explicit, but later masks or even erases her significance as in The Prelude and the Preface. Wordsworth often views mothers as threats to his own independence as a poet but at the same time embraces the recognition that the mother-child bond represents for him.

We can also read the mother's continuing concern with the child's fear as a projection of her own fear that she may not be able to protect and provide for her child: "Then do not fear, my boy! for thee / Bold as a lion will I be" (51-2). She also says she will build an "Indian bower" (55) to shelter him and explains that she knows the "earth-nuts fit for food" so that she can feed him (96).<sup>26</sup> Daniel Stern's life-growth theme helps describe the mother's concern which Wordsworth may be depicting. This theme

concerns the physical well-being and development of the child: mothers generally wonder if they "can keep the[ir] bab[ies] alive" and provide for all their physical needs (Motherhood 175). Given that this mother has full responsibility for her child (she is "alone") and that she apparently has no financial resources, it seems reasonable that she would be afraid that she might not be able to provide for her child; her repeated assertions of her survival skills (that she can provide for the child) ring with a defensiveness. Since the mother gives us no specific reasons why her son might be afraid, we can read her assertions of his fear as a projection of her own fears; she makes her representation of him as afraid more like her representation of herself as afraid. She does not seem to maintain a balance of similitude in dissimilitude, of recognizing how her son might feel differently from her.

In stanza six the mother expresses identification with her son by emphasizing his future singing ability, the ability through which she expresses herself in the song. She says, "thou shalt sing / As merry as the birds in spring" (59-60), and then in stanza nine she says, "I'll teach him how the owlet sings" (82). The abandoned mother has become a creature of nature herself (the balladeer makes clear she "talked and sung the woods among"), so she has presumably learned to sing like the creatures of nature herself (at least she believes she has). These songs are purely semiotic; they do not express a symbolic meaning, but

are only made of tone and rhythm. She stresses that he will sing in a sort of language which, though beautiful, bears no meaning. In desiring to teach her son how to sing like the birds, she identifies her present skills with his future skills. The progression of her expression of desire is interesting in that at first she views the child's singing status as conditional (she will teach him only "if from me thou wilt not go" [57]), but in the second expression, there is no conditional clause: she will "teach him how the owlet sings"; with this implied threat, his leaving her is not an option. As the doubt or condition is excluded, the mother's identification with her child becomes closer: in her mind, the child is like her because he has the potential to be a singer like her.

Wordsworth reveals why the mother is alone in the next stanza: "Thy father cares not for my breast" (61), yet the precise reason why the father deserts his wife and child is uncertain. She suggests that he may have left because she is no longer attractive; her breast used to be "so fair to view" (64) but now "its hue" has changed, perhaps because of the swelling brought on by pregnancy and lactation. She also says that her beauty has "flown" (65) and that her "cheek" is now "brown" (67). Throughout the description of her faded beauty, she repeats that even though she is not as attractive as she used to be, she is pretty enough for her son: her breast "'Tis all thy own'" (63) and "fair enough for thee," so consequently, "thou wilt live with me in love"

(65-66). The final two lines are especially telling: "'Tis well for me, thou canst not see / How pale and wan it else would be" (69-70). Her formerly fair breast would be attractive to the father, but without the fullness and color brought on by lactation and the birth of the son, it would appear "pale and wan" to her son. Consequently, the mother appears to express, once again, an ambivalence toward her son. At one level, she appears to feel aggression toward him because his arrival may have caused her to lose her beauty and consequently caused her husband to lose interest in her. However, at another, she loves the son because without him she would be alone.

The mother also directly expresses ambivalent feelings towards her husband, the child's father, who has deserted them. At one level she rejects him: "If his sweet boy he could forsake / With me he never would have stayed" (75-76). If the father could desert the beautiful son, he certainly would not have been loyal to her over time, so he is unworthy. On the other hand, her assertion that she is the father's "wedded wife" when coupled with her praying "For him that's gone and far away" implies a forgiveness and a wish to remain affiliated with the father (72, 80). The ambivalence that the mother expresses toward the father helps explain why the mother desires connection with her son; she has been deserted and is angry with the one who left her, but his leaving made her sad, and she longs for the connection with the father (or a similar connection)

which preceded her abandonment and made her happy. The father is the cause of and solution for her pain in separation. Since the father is absent, she transfers her strong desire for connection to her son. In this very complex poem, Wordsworth not only presents the mother's madness, but he also suggests her motivation for her over-identification.

The mother's reference to her son as "my little life" in stanza eight (71) reinforces the reader's awareness of her over-identification with him. In general usage a reference to "my life" is a reference to one's own life, but here the mother refers to the child's life as her life; she identifies herself so closely with the son that his life becomes my life. However, the mother also refers to herself and her son as "we two" (74, 79). Like "my Life," this expression embraces the mother's connection to and separation from her child at the same time: we emphasizes their connection and her identification with him and two expresses a simultaneous awareness of their separateness. This is another example of the mother's partial awareness of her son's difference even though she does view their relationship as symbiotic. Because she seems to retain some awareness of the child's difference, the mother veers away from the sort of pure identification which Demetrakopolous describes (432) and the kind of "psychotic discourse" in which, according to Kristeva, semiotic activity engulfs the

symbolic (Kristeva Desire 133). But despite the slight difference she does maintain, the relationship still appears to be a dangerous "seduction" (Klein 301), of not observing boundaries. She speaks with a voice that articulates some separation but mostly identification with her son.

In stanza nine, the child stops nursing and breaks the physical bond with the mother, and consequently, her intense identification with him begins, temporarily, to break down. At the beginning of the stanza she relays her fantasy of their future together, "I'll teach my boy the sweetest things: / I'll teach him how the owlet sings," again emphasizing a shared semiotic activity. However, in the only moment in which the mother specifically describes her son's actions, she realizes the child's "lips are still," and he has "sucked [his] fill" (81-84). He does not behave as she wishes him to behave; the reality of her son's behavior, as it differs from her expectation, disrupts her intense identification with him. With this severing of their physical bond, the mother panics:

--Where art thou gone, my own dear child?  
 What wicked looks are those I see?  
 Alas! alas! that look so wild,  
 It never, never came from me:  
 If thou art mad, my pretty lad,  
 Then I must be for ever sad. (85-90)

The mother's perspective shifts, a shift visually marked by the dash, from viewing her child as a "lovely baby" to a creature with "wicked" and "wild looks"; he has taken on the evil expressions of the "fiendish faces" whom the mother

recalled in stanza two. Even though she has previously recognized the child as a partially separate entity, when he physically pulls away from her, she is startled by the material reality of their difference. She cannot tolerate the natural severing that occurs when nursing is complete. The child's disconnection from her emphasizes the mother's separateness from him, and her separateness from her husband and society. This break dispels her fantasy of what F. H. Langman calls "a pastoral idyll harboring no enemy but winter and rough weather" (77). Instead of representing the dyad as the "we two" (74, 79) who will live together in an Indian bower, she distances herself far from the child with this new representation of possible madness--"It [the madness] never, never came from me"--and Wordsworth underscores the reader's awareness that of course the madness (or "mad" physical behavior) came from her: either the child imitates the mother's facial expressions as children often do after nursing,<sup>27</sup> or the mother projects her own madness onto her representation of the child. The mother is so closely bonded with her son that she cannot see how her behaviour influences his.

After the mother acknowledges that if her child is mad, she "must be forever sad" (90), she shifts her tone: "Oh smile on me my little lamb! / For I thy own dear mother am" (91-92). She frantically tries to grasp at her bond with the son and make him acknowledge their union by begging him to smile on her. Even though the child has not deserted her

as the husband did, regaining the physical union seems to be her all-consuming passion, the only way to assure herself that the child will not leave her or separate from her (which he undoubtedly will, as all children do). She seems to need material assurance, a physical attachment, that he is bonded to her. In desperation, she reminds her son that her love "has well been tried" (93, my emphasis) and gives him reasons, but those he surely cannot understand, for why he should do as she expects. In one sense tried suggests that she has proven her love by seeking "his father in the woods," by saving him from the "poisons of the shade," and finding him "earth-nuts fit for food" (94-96). She seems to make one last appeal for him to love her. However, tried also suggests a test of patience: the child is "trying" her love. She has done all that she can do to provide for the son (i.e., food and protection), and he repays her by not doing as she expects, by not remaining physically attached to her as she is psychically bonded to him. From this perspective, the catalogue of reasons seems to represent her frustration with her son and to convey a threat to him.

However, the final reason she says the son should continue to love her reminds us of the reason why she is probably so attached and over-invested in him in the first place: "Then, pretty dear be not afraid: / We'll find thy father in the wood" (97-98). This is the other relation by which the mother has repeatedly defined her identity (61,



72). Not only does she want to stay bonded with the son, but she also wants to reconnect with the father. Invoking the father twice in this final stanza reminds readers why the mother is so closely attached to her son. Her husband has abandoned her, and it seems unlikely that he will want to return to her. However, her re-emphasis on the father's absence strongly suggests the source of her desperate pleas for her son to smile on her and to love her. If her son does not love her as she loves him, then she will feel completely alone. The son is a compensation for the loss of her husband. As F. H. Langman notes, "the child is what enables her to retain her identity: its need holds her to responsibility, enables her to love, and therefore gives her the wish and the power to live and foster life" (73). Her identity is rooted in relation to another; if she is alone, her identity deteriorates and her voice fragments. What Langman neglects to point out is the danger of such a connection; as Klein tells us, babies cannot provide what mothers need to shore up their identities. They need adults who already have an awareness of difference, who have their own identities. This mother has become so invested in her child that she cannot tolerate any deviation from her expectations of him.

Until these last two stanzas the mother seems precariously situated between an intense identification with her son and her awareness of their separation; Wordsworth presents a mother who is on the verge of but has not quite

merged her identity with her son's. By the end of the song, she lapses into madness because she cannot cope with the child's physical separation from her and her perception of the possibility of another desertion. Consequently, she denies the reality of the situation--his separateness from her--and strives only for connection: she wants his will to match her will. Her solution is to simply "laugh and be gay, to the woods away." She invokes mad laughter because she cannot make meaning out of her situation. Laughter is an appropriate response because it is even more semiotic than the extremely semiotic language of her song so far. Laughter (as a semiotic activity) does not express separation/difference; it expresses identification/sameness.<sup>28</sup> Through laughter, the mother suggests they can overcome the separation she experiences (and suggests her child experiences) and live blissfully together "for aye" (100). The glibness of this rhyme suggests the futility of such an option: in reality, mother and child cannot stay connected "for aye." Choosing "for aye" to express an imagined eternity (instead of "forever" or "for e'er") further reinforces this experience of imagined merger which she expresses. Aye also invokes the homonym I (especially when read aloud) which creates further semiotic confusion in the poem's closing, a confusion which creates difficulty in many readers' separation from the poem as well.

Beyond evoking laughter as a semiotic activity, Wordsworth's shift in rhyme and meter in the final couplet also disrupts the regularity of the stanzas in the mother's song. He shifts from the regular, almost hypnotic, iambic tetrameter of the song to one line of tetrameter with one iambic foot, two anapestic feet, and a final iambic foot, and another line of pentameter with iambic feet. He also eliminates the regular end rhyme of the final couplets of each stanza ("away" and "I") and instead includes internal rhyme of "gay" and "away" in the couplet's first line. The only certainty that readers have become accustomed to in reading the poem has been the regular, reassuring rhyme and meter. But with this final, irregular couplet, Wordsworth disrupts that certainty as well.

The uncertainty of the poem's conclusion shows us what happens when a mother over-identifies with her child, when there is no balance of dissimilitude. The laughter, the disruption of metrical regularity, and the general uncertainty about what will happen to the mother and child when they retreat into the wilderness create an uncomfortable sense of boundlessness for readers. With this uncertain conclusion, Wordsworth gives readers a freedom to construct and speculate about what happens, but with that freedom comes a longing for authority, a longing for some fixed meaning in a situation which seems meaningless.

\*   \*   \*

The mother's fantasy of escape into the wilderness and denial of separation from her son parallels nicely the problem of punctuation in the poem and the balladeer's inability to separate his voice from the mother's in early editions. In all versions of the poem the mother cannot separate the fantasy of her situation from its reality; she dismisses the difficulty of her and her son's situation and decides simply to "laugh and be gay." If we rely on texts of the poem up until 1805 which all exclude closing quotations marks for the song, we also see the balladeer's "inability to distance himself" from the voice he rehearses (Wolfson 46).<sup>29</sup> The balladeer cannot separate his voice from the mother's because he has so completely "absorbed her voice and sensibility into his own" (Wolfson 46). As I previously argued, texts after 1805 demonstrate a gradual move towards marking the balladeer's separation from the mother: in the 1805 Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth closes the final line of the mother's song with quotation marks and subtly signals the end of the balladeer's rehearsal of the mother's song (100); in the 1832 Poetical Works, he adds quotation marks to the beginning of the final stanza which further remind readers that the balladeer has been singing the mother's song;<sup>30</sup> and in the 1836 Poetical Works, he adds Roman numerals at the beginning of each stanza which most decisively score the narrative as a poem and further reminds

readers that the words they read are filtered through another voice.

The contrast between these varying editions is illuminating. Once again, Wordsworth distances a poetic narrator's voice from a represented mother through revision over time. If we only read early editions, then the intense identification with the character reinforces the identification between mother and child represented in the poem. The early editions add to the uncertainty of the poem's conclusion and leave readers in an even greater sense of perplexity, wanting a clearer signal to mark the poem's closing so that they can separate themselves from the action. However, in later editions, the narrator's distance from the mother contrasts to her intense identification with the child. As Wordsworth continually reminds readers of the balladeer's separation from the woman with "wild eyes," then we as readers will tend to retain some distance from her song; we are not as likely to become engulfed by the mother's song ourselves and more likely to retain some separation. Several poems in Lyrical Ballads close without a resolution (i.e., "We Are Seven," and "The Female Vagrant"), but this poem, especially in early editions, leaves readers with much more anxiety. Unlike the blessed babe scene in The Prelude in which the child's uncertain experience similitude in dissimilitude produces a positive recognition of the mother as an other who is like him but different, the experience Wordsworth represents in this

mother's over-identification with her child is negative because she never acknowledges and accepts her child's difference, only his similarity to her. In this experiment of giving a mother a voice, Wordsworth explores the poetic possibilities and dangers of extreme identification.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In "Wordsworth and the Sucking Babe," Alice Goodman sees only two narrative levels in the poem: that of the poet and that of the narrator. I, on the other hand will distinguish among three: Wordsworth, the balladeer, and the mother.

<sup>2</sup> Kristeva also associates incest with extreme semiotic activity, and I believe it is fair to characterize the mother's relationship with her infant as incestuous.

<sup>3</sup> The mother's voice would not become as semiotic as the child's since she did, at one time at least, have an awareness of difference to complement her ability to identify with others, but the voice would become more semiotic than before; it is a matter of degree.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel N. Stern has a very similar definition in The Motherhood Constellation after which I model my definition. Stern also has very interesting speculations about how identification is tangibly enacted, beyond intrapsychic representations (53-4). When referring to children in my discussions of theories of early child development in this section, I use masculine pronouns as the theorists I am discussing do, but when I synthesize the material into my own conclusions I use plural pronouns.

<sup>5</sup> Parenthetical citations refer to Butler and Green's Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800 in The Cornell Wordsworth series.

<sup>6</sup> In chapter three (107-112), I discussed how Wordsworth claims to use meter to break the verisimilitude he might create in a poem.

<sup>7</sup> Butler and Green's text of "The Mad Mother" in the Cornell Lyrical Ballads is undoubtedly the most reliable and useful because the editors accurately consider all substantive and accidental alterations of the poem, so I will rely on their text for my notations. I will, however, refer to the poem by the later title, "Her Eyes Are Wild." Throughout my discussion I will refer to varying editions

and explore the significance of Wordsworth's subtle changes as they influence readings of the poem. As in most of Wordsworth's poems, seemingly minor alterations may drastically change the way one interprets this poem. There are a number of textual problems with this poem. Most significantly, two twentieth-century editors of Wordsworth's works, De Selincourt and Hayden, add punctuation to the poem (quotation marks at the beginning of stanzas 2-9) which was not present in any lifetime editions of Wordsworth's works.

<sup>8</sup> See Jonathan Wordsworth's recent facsimile edition of the 1798 Lyrical Ballads. Except for Butler and Green, none of the standard editions make clear this final addition of quotation marks in 1805.

<sup>9</sup> Quotation marks have a greater significance for this poem in terms of its textual history. Apparently in De Selincourt's edition of Wordsworth's poems he added quotation marks to the beginning of each stanza which further serve to remind the reader of the separation between the balladeer and mother. In personal correspondence to me, James Butler writes "I believe that there is not a lifetime state with the quotation marks before the first word of each of stanzas 2-10. The implication would then be that de Selincourt changed the punctuation--as he frequently did."

<sup>10</sup> For example, in a letter to Biggs and Cottle (mid-July 1800), the publishers of the 1800 two-volume edition of Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth instructs the publishers that a comma must be substituted for the semicolon after 'for me;' in line 69 (Early Years 288).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, F. H. Langman. He believes "the whole poem, after a single introductory stanza, is spoken by the woman herself" (72).

<sup>12</sup> Oddly, he deletes this addition in all subsequent editions which suggests a continuing ambivalence on how closely he wants to associate the narrator's and the mother's voice.

<sup>13</sup> I in no way mean to suggest that identification is only important for mother and child. The process is certainly important throughout individuals' lives as people imaginatively place themselves in the positions of others in order to better understand them.

<sup>14</sup> D.W. Winnicott posits a similar bonding. He labels the mother's early period of intense "sensitivity" to her child as primary maternal preoccupation, a "withdrawn" or "dissociated state" or "fugue" (302) in which the mother is sensitized so that she can "feel herself into her infant's

place" ("Primary" 302, 304). Without temporarily entering this state, the two do not sufficiently bond, and the mother cannot adequately interpret the infant's physical and psychological needs. The extreme phase lasts through the later stages of pregnancy until a few weeks after the infant is born, and he characterizes the state as an "illness" or "schizoid episode" which is not actually an illness because it begins to occur during pregnancy. In a parenthetical note, Winnicott says, "I bring in the word 'illness' because a woman must be healthy in order both to develop this state and to recover from it as the infant releases her. If the infant should die, the mother's state suddenly shows up as illness. The mother takes this risk" (302). A certain "ego-relatedness" between the mother and infant results from this identification, and from it the infant may build "the idea of a person in the mother" and not just an object (304). Even more than Klein, Winnicott views the significance of this identification in terms of the infant's development.

<sup>15</sup> This over-identification will also have implications for the child as he may become "too dependent on her," which will greatly slow his development (323). Klein views the mother's intense identification with her child (and implicitly with her mother) as healthy and natural, so long as the attachment is not too extreme; however, this part of her formulation is problematic because she does not precisely delineate what constitutes "too extreme."

<sup>16</sup> See Stern's The Motherhood Constellation (174-80) for a full elaboration of the four themes of the motherhood constellation.

<sup>17</sup> See Stern's Interpersonal World (104-5) for more on the myth of fusion.

<sup>18</sup> James Averill demonstrates that Wordsworth was aware of contemporary psychological theory in Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering. In particular he shows how "details in some of the poems . . . reflect Wordsworth's reading of Darwin's chapter [in Zoonomia] on "Diseases of Increased Volition." In particular he makes a connection between breast-feeding and mental health. He says that Darwin advises that, "'in cases of acute puerperal depression, 'the child should be brought frequently to the mother, and applied to her breast, if she will suffer it, and this whether she at first attends to it or not. As by a few trials it frequently excites the storgè, or maternal affection and removes the insanity' (Zoonomia 2.360)." Averill goes on to remark that the Mad Mother of "Her Eyes Are Wild" is "relieved by nursing her child" (Averill 156).



<sup>19</sup> See Klein's "Weaning" for a detailed explanation of the significance of the infant's early relationship with the maternal breast and identity development.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel Stern observes specific behaviors in breast-feeding in which the mother identifies with her infant. For example, when an infant just begins a feeding, and the mother knows to sit quietly so as not to distract the child from eating, she appears to be able to identify with the child. Conversely, if the child is in the middle of feeding and has reached the point of partial satiation, and the mother does not know that the child needs to be stimulated (stroked, patted, jiggled) in order to begin sucking again, then she does not appear to identify with her child's situation (Motherhood 71).

<sup>21</sup> The mother experiences her own physical pleasure but also closely identifies with the child's pleasure in satisfying his hunger because she is able to recall the experience of this interaction with her own mother when she was young. Stern argues that the mother remembers "the parts that she experienced directly as a baby, while interacting with her mother, and the parts of her mother's experience of interaction with her that she experienced empathically" (Motherhood 181).

<sup>22</sup> See Interpersonal World (104-123) for a detailed discussion of the distinction between merger and being with.

<sup>23</sup> I should re-emphasize that, in my view, the mother's song is framed by a narrator/balladeer, and that this balladeer repeats the song, or a version of the song, as he has heard it. When I say the mother sings, it should be understood that the narrator actually repeats her song. Of course, Wordsworth is behind the balladeer and controls both levels of the narrative.

<sup>24</sup> This emphasis on the child's corporeality reverses the typical emphasis critics see in romantic poetry on the mother's body.

<sup>25</sup> I discuss the source of semiotic activity in chapter two (28-32).

<sup>26</sup> In book one of The Prelude, Wordsworth compares himself as a child to a boy "born on Indian plains" who ran from his "mother's hut" (302-3).

<sup>27</sup> Stern describes this kind of face to face interaction in The Motherhood Constellation (71-72).

<sup>28</sup> For more on the relationship between laughter and the semiotic see Kristeva's "Place Names: Childhood Language, Infantile Language" in Desire in Language (271-294).

<sup>29</sup> Wolfson's focus is only on the narrator's construction of and identification with the mother and not the mother as a constructed subject in her own right.

<sup>30</sup> He deletes this addition in all subsequent editions which suggests his ambivalence in the degree to which he marks the separation between the balladeer's and mother's voices.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**MOTHERS IN MOURNING: VOICE, FIGURATION, AND**  
**CONTINUITY**

If, then, in a creature endowed with the faculties of foresight and reason, the social affections could not have unfolded themselves uncountenanced by the faith that Man is an immortal being; and if, consequently, neither could the individual dying have had a desire to survive in the remembrance of his fellows, nor on their side could they have felt a wish to preserve for future times vestiges of the departed; it follows, as a final inference, that without the belief in immortality, wherein these several desires originate, neither monuments nor epitaphs, in affectionate or laudatory commemoration of the deceased, could have existed in the world.

William Wordsworth, "Essay upon Epitaphs"  
(1810)

Feminist critiques of men's representations of woman often assume a strict duality of male writer as subject and woman (usually conflated with nature) as object. This model is a powerful one, suggesting a fundamental critique of representation itself (at least with Western culture). But too rigid a dichotomy of male subject and female object allows us to forget that, even according to men's depiction of themselves, subjectivity is initially produced through interaction with a woman.

Alan Richardson, "Romanticism and the  
Colonization of the Feminine."

In chapter four I discussed "Her Eyes are Wild" in terms of the narrator-mother and mother-child dyads. The fact that Wordsworth represents mother and child as physically present and literally connected in that poem made it a useful avenue through which to explore identification. In this chapter I will investigate poems in which mothers are physically separated by distance and/or death and explore how they resist separation from their children with

symbolic activity. In other words, I will examine poems in which mothers attempt to mourn the losses of their children by various means. In all of these poems, Wordsworth represents the mothers as trying to recreate a version of the absent child in different ways. As I have shown in chapter two, psychoanalytic theory suggests that infants do this when they begin to use symbolic activity: when the maternal figure, usually female, is absent, the child uses objects or language to try to replace her as in Freud's fort/da example.<sup>1</sup> What is interesting in Wordsworth's poetry is that he not only portrays this sort of dynamic from the perspective of children (as in book two of The Prelude), but that he also repeatedly portrays it from mothers' perspectives: the adult mother produces a figure (linguistically or concretely) in order to help her mourn the loss of her child.

Certainly, a mother's figurations are more complex than a child's substitution of a spool or language for a mother in early language development (as in Freud's fort/da example), and Wordsworth does not view the positions of mother and child as reciprocal. However, in his poems a child's absence does often lead mothers to create figures or symbols of varying complexity: physical structures, hallucinations, simple stories, and even complex poems. I am interested in examining those poems in which mothers lose or are separated from their children and how they use adult figurations to mourn their more permanent losses.

What these figurations suggest is that Wordsworth does not always represent women as objects as some critics have suggested. For example, in her introduction to the very important collection, Romanticism and Feminism, Anne Mellor says that the six major "male" poets of the romantic period (Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats):

have been heralded because they endorsed a concept of the self as a power that gains control over and gives significance to nature, a nature troped in their writings as female. They thus legitimized the continued repression of women. (8)

In addition, Margaret Homans argues persuasively that "romantic poetry . . . states most compellingly the traditional myth, as transmitted through literature, of women's place in language as the silent or vanished object of male representation and quest" (40). I would agree with Mellor and Homans to an extent; however, several of Wordsworth's poems that represent mothers who are separated from children give women voices: they are present subjects with powers of figuration. If part of the romantic project is to silence or objectify women, why does Wordsworth represent certain mothers with voices, some of which are quite complex?

Wordsworth's repeated attentions to mothers demonstrate a more varied and complex attitude toward representing women than critics have observed. As we have seen in his revisions of The Prelude, the Preface, and "Her Eyes Are Wild," in later work he becomes more anxious about viewing mothers as subjects, acknowledging their significance in his

poetics, and identifying with them as poetic speakers. Wordsworth follows a similar pattern in poems about mourning. In early poems he seems more willing to experiment with giving women voices (even though he generally frames them with external narrators) but in later poems, the narrators dominate and the mothers recede. Despite the shift in emphasis, Wordsworth consistently experiments with different ways to represent mothers' voices.

In what follows, I will first define mourning and make some connections between this grieving activity and poetic composition. Then I will examine three poems from Wordsworth's Poems, in Two Volumes (1807)--"The Sailor's Mother," "The Emigrant Mother," and "The Affliction of Margaret"--and show how he constructs voices of mothers with varying complexity, in one case, depicting a mother's voice as very similar to a poet's. Finally, I will investigate two later poems--"The Force of Prayer" (1815) and "The Widow on Windermere" (1842)--and demonstrate how Wordsworth depicts these mothers as mourning with less access to language than earlier characters. Wordsworth depicts mothers who strive to endure their losses and to bring continuity to their lives in all these poems. In representing mothers who articulate and fulfill their desires to varying degrees, he constructs mothers who are not simply objects of desire themselves. The symbolizations or works of mourning these women produce are like the poet's

constructions of poems. The poet and these mothers both strive to recollect persons or re-order original experiences in order to accept their separation and maintain a sense of connection.

### **Mourning and Poetic Composition**

Mourning is an especially important concept in this chapter because I will examine poems in which mothers repeatedly grieve the loss of children; moreover, mourning appears to be structured like and even to represent language use and poetic creation. Building mostly on the work of Freud and Erikson, Robert J. Lifton says that mourning is a survivor's

struggle to reconstitute his psychic life in a way that can enable him to separate from the dead person while retaining a sense of connection with him, free himself from the deadness of that person and reestablish within himself, sometimes in altered form, whatever modes of immortality have been threatened by the death. (Broken 96)

He stresses the significance of both separation and connection, of accepting the loss of the other but also maintaining a connection with that person in a way which is similar to recognition. However, recognition concerns, more generally, difference, and not just separation, and recognition can only occur with an other who is living. The means to maintaining connection with the absent other is symbolization. For Lifton, symbolization is "the specifically human need to construct all experience as the only means of perceiving, knowing, and feeling" (6). Through symbolization in mourning the survivor re-orders the

experiences of the other with enough difference to accept the real separation (the physical death) and with enough similarity to create continuity in the survivor's life. Without building this continuity, Lifton argues that "psychic numbing" or stasis overwhelms the survivor. Likewise, if a survivor creates too much connection, the survivor becomes too dependent on (obsessed with) the absent other and cannot bring continuity to life.

I have already discussed and critiqued the Lacanian model, which Homans revises, in chapter two and explained how children begin to use symbolic activity because of the perceived "death" of the mother and how this "death" structures later substitution and figuration. Within the context of death, this substitution (symbolic activity) appears to be a sort of mourning: a way for children to free themselves from the mother figure while at the same time remaining connected to her (or him). Since part of poetic creation is based on overtly symbolic activity, the "death" of the mother figure also structures this type of adult symbolic activity. However, this death dynamic is much more complicated in poetic creation than in early symbolic activity, just as mourning carried out by adults can be more complicated than mourning carried out by children. As Lifton notes, "What distinguishes adult grief [mourning] and depression is symbolization around loss that is, compared to childhood counterparts, much more elaborate and more intensely focused" (Broken 187).



Lifton presents five symbolic modes of immortality that enable people to assert continuity when they experience the death of the other: the biological mode (offspring or a family line); the theological mode (life after death or "transcending death through spiritual attainment"); the "works" mode (creativity, having an enduring impact on humanity); the natural mode (being survived by nature); and the experiential mode (achieving a state in which time and death disappear, losing one's self in artistic, athletic, sexual, or drug-induced experiences) (Life 32-34).<sup>2</sup> In the poems I will examine, several of these modes are thematically represented, but for the purpose of my study the "works" mode is especially significant. First, Wordsworth the poet writes his poems to insure his cultural immortality, and second, the characters he represents produce or strive to fashion "works" (physical structures and stories) that give a sense of immortality to themselves and the absent other, a sense of continuity between them. Just as Wordsworth creates, so are his characters represented as creating.

While the parallel between mourning and language use is manifest in poetic practice, I believe that Lifton's definition of mourning and Wordsworth's definition of poetry are also very similar. Wordsworth argues that poetry is

the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which

was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins. (57-58)

His formulation of the beginnings of poetry has two basic parts: 1) an original experience which he has been separated from by time--the actual experience is "dead"; and 2) his recollection, his re-ordering or re-collection, of that experience.<sup>3</sup> The recollection is clearly not the same as the original, but it is "kindred" to it, similar to and yet different from it. Mourning a dead person follows a similar pattern. Death separates the survivor from the absent other; then, eventually the survivor, in successful cases, reconstructs the other with enough difference to accept that person's actual death but also with enough similarity to establish a connection with him or her in order to affirm the continuity of life (Lifton Broken 96).

An apparent difference between the creation of poetry and the work of mourning is that making poetry generally involves the recollection of an experience while mourning involves the recollection of a person. Linda Edelstein has argued for a broader definition of mourning that includes "other changes" that "entail separations." She sees mourning as an example of "adaptation" or a "striving toward acceptable compromise with life." She says that "When viewed as reactions and adaptations to loss and change, mourning can be seen occurring continuously throughout life" (11-12). With this conceptualization of mourning work as

including experiences and people, the paradigmatic similarity remains that both poetry and mourning require a person's separation from a person or experience and the recollection or representation of that person which accepts actual difference. To say that poetry equals mourning is of course too extreme; as I will show in "The Force of Prayer," for example, Romilly's mother mourns more through architectonic figuration than linguistic figuration. But poetic creation (as Wordsworth defines it) and mourning work are structured similarly because both require separation from the original experience/other and also symbolic reconnection with the original that accepts actual separation. In some cases, poetic creation might be considered a form of mourning work; making poetry is a way, in Lifton's terms, to perceive, know, and feel loss (6).

### **Three Studies of Mothers' Voices in Poems, in Two Volumes**

Wordsworth published three poems about mothers who have been separated from their children in his 1807 collection Poems, in Two Volumes, and he explores mothers' experiences of mourning and figuration differently in all three poems. All three mothers are constructed with voices, but each one varies in complexity. In "The Sailor's Mother" he depicts a mother who tells the story of the loss of her son with the help of a bird and cage her son used to own. In "The Emigrant Mother" he portrays a narrator's construction of a mother's separation from her son and shows how the mother

uses a neighbor child to overcome her loss. In "The Affliction of Margaret" he presents a mother who is not framed by a narrator and who tells her uncertain story of the loss of her son, a son who may have deserted her or who may be dead. Even though these women are in similar situations of loss, they all mourn and speak differently. Indeed, one of the strengths of Wordsworth's representations of mothers in the collection lies in the variety of their mourning; he does not have a consistent paradigm for representing mothers, but continues to experiment with appropriate representations.

The earliest of the three poems, "The Sailor's Mother" (composed March 11-12, 1802), opens with a narrator who says he saw a woman on the road who was "tall and straight . . . . like a Roman matron[]" (6).<sup>4</sup> The figure of the "Majestic" woman makes him proud that his "country bred / Such strength" (5, 9-10), and when the woman asks him for alms, his "pride" does not "abate" (12). However, instead of complying with her request, he interrogates her: "'Beneath your Cloak / What's that which on your arm you bear'" (14-15).<sup>5</sup> She responds that it is, "'A simple burthen, Sir, a little Singing-bird'" (18), and then tells him that the bird belonged to her son who died at sea. The sailor took it on all his voyages except the last one because of "bodings of his mind" (30). She recovered the bird from a friend of his, and it is the only possession of his that remains.

The way the woman bears her "simple burthen," carrying it beneath her cloak gives her the visual appearance of a pregnant woman, a biological mother, or a woman carrying a child on her arm. The narrator seems to latch onto this quality unconsciously in his characterization of the woman as a "Roman matron" (also a reference to those who lose sons) in the first stanza of the poem. Since her own son has died, the mother's burden, the bird and cage, visually appear to be a sort of substitute child.<sup>6</sup> Her real son is dead, and all that remains of him is the bird who took "many voyages" with him, a creature in which "he took so much delight" (27, 36). She realizes that her behavior displays "little wit" (35)--this substitution is a little crazy--but literally keeping close to her son's bird comforts her.

George Pollock describes a similar sort of object attachment as a "denial of separation," and says that mourners may displace their attachments from people onto

auxiliaries which are reminders of the departed. Thus, old letters, keepsakes, portraits, eyeglasses, bits of hair, clothing, and other intimate possessions are treated as if they have to be constant reminders of the existence of the object [the dear departed]. In some instances this reflects the inability to let the object die, be buried, and let life go on. (25)

However, the sailor's mother's attachment to the bird and cage is not a denial of separation because she knows why she carries it and uses it tell the story of her son.

Connecting with this symbol of her lost son helps her mourn

him and gives her solace. She achieves a balance of similitude in dissimilitude in relation to the bird.

The mother's mourning goes beyond the simple substitution of bird for son as a means to remember him (unlike the Mad Mother who seems unconsciously to substitute son for husband). She can also mourn him by telling his story. Narrative allows her to reconnect with her son, to bring him back to life, while at the same time letting her accept his death. The bird and cage are the catalyst for her ability to tell this story to the narrator. She is not a first-person representation, but she is a woman who can tell the story of her loss. Even though the sailor's mother's narrative is not the most complex that Wordsworth creates, he does give her a degree of self-consciousness (she knows her behavior displays "little wit"), and he does represent her as the seeker and not the sought-after object.

\*   \*   \*

While in "The Sailor's Mother" Wordsworth depicts a mother who uses a bird in a cage to help her mourn her drowned son, in "The Emigrant Mother" he presents a mother who has been separated from her son and uses another child to help mourn her loss in a much more complex fashion. As in many of his poems about mothers, Wordsworth begins this poem very self-consciously with a narrator who meta-poetically reveals the source of the poem or "lay."<sup>7</sup> In the introductory section, the narrator explains that he is friends with a French emigrant who has been separated from

her own child, that she has often shared her "griefs" with him, and that the poem that follows is a song about what she "might say" to a neighbor child (12). At the end of the introduction he says, "My song the workings of her heart expressed" to stress his identification with her (14) in a fashion similar to the balladeer's identification in "The Pet-Lamb" in Lyrical Ballads.<sup>8</sup>

The song is a combination of the narrator's understanding of the emigrant mother's experience and the narrator's own imagination; it is based on what the narrator "knew, had heard, and guessed" (12-13). I believe this detailed, meta-poetic introduction suggests that the poem is an example of Wordsworth's definition of poetry as the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . . . . recollected in tranquillity" (57), an enactment of what he describes in The Prelude when he characterizes the infant mind which is the model for the poetic spirit as "creator and receiver both." The narrator "guesses" parts of the emigrant's story which is an overtly creative act; he separates what actually happened to the woman from what he individually "guesses" has happened. To tell what he "knows" or has "heard" from her is a receptive act because he describes what has actually happened--what he knows has happened based on his relationship with the emigrant.<sup>9</sup> In the song section which follows the introduction, Wordsworth represents the mother as relying on creative and receptive

facets of her imagination to tell her story and to mourn her son.<sup>10</sup>

In the first stanza, the constructed mother describes the "'Dear Babe['s]'" separation from her real mother who is working in the fields (15). The emigrant mother suggests that the child could comfort her if she would be her child for "'one little hour.'" She then explains her separation from her son who apparently still lives in France, emphasizing the distance as "'A long, long way of land and sea'" (24, 27). Next, she admits the possibility of complete separation from her son because he may be dead. Before leaving France the mother's tears fell on her son's face, and a nurse told her that such an act was "'unlucky'"; however, the mother then hyperbolically denies the act's unluckiness with a series of four no's. After vehemently denying that her tears killed him, she then says that he will die because, according to those who take care of the child in the mother's absence, "'He pines'" (47). Here we have the narrator outside the song representing the mother as doing exactly what he has done with his introduction: she bases some of the story on direct experience, but then guesses, to fill in the details about her child that she does not actually know, details that suggest a fantasy of identification. The mother hopes her son pines for her just as she obviously pines for him. Just as the narrator in the introduction, she bases the story both on information that she has received and that she



creates; her experience of loss leads her to develop a voice to construct a sense of reality (at least the narrator represents her as doing so). Wordsworth represents, indirectly, an identification between the narrator/poet and the mother in this poem.

However, the woman's creative imagination fails to satisfy when the narrator figures her as realizing that the little girl's "'cheerful smiles'" and "'looks'" are not the same as her son's (49, 51). Despite her efforts to make the girl into her child, by stanza five the illusion "'Tis gone-forgotten" (55). She sees the smiles of her son in her mind's eye and then recognizes that the smiles of the girl do not correspond (much as the Mad Mother who has difficulty when her son's actions do not meet her expectations). The little girl "'troublest'" and "'confound[s]'" her to the degree that she "'must lay [her] down'" (59-63). The receptive power of her imagination overcomes her creative impulse: knowing overcomes guessing. The mother consciously works through a fantasy (reality as she would like it to be) and arrives at the reality of her situation as it is.

Her troubled state continues in stanza six. The narrator constructs her as no longer trying to make the child into her son and explains that she loves the little girl for her own sake. She loves her even more than her sister's child who also lives nearby and "'who bears [the emigrant's] name'" (67). The French woman even goes so far

as to say that "'Never was any child more dear'" which suggests that she loves the infant girl more than any other child, even her own son (74). She tries to erase the son to whom she can only connect through memory and to replace him with an actual child who is present but not her own.

In stanza seven, however, this replacement strategy also fails. The verse paragraph begins with a very intrusive dash which marks an abrupt shift in the narrator's depiction of her thinking, a mark of punctuation Wordsworth uses similarly in "Her Eyes Are Wild."<sup>11</sup> The mother reveals that she "'cannot help it'" but that she must weep (75); she cannot replace her son. She fears that her tears and words do the girl-child harm but then, suddenly, the infant gives her a warm kiss which puts her heart "'again in its place'" (84). In a moment of synaesthesia, she says the child's eyes would "'speak'" to help her "'if they could'" (81-82). She receives the sensory impression that the child's eyes are on her, but she creatively embellishes the impression as the child's act of sympathy. The mother could be projecting her desire to be comforted onto the child, or she could be accurately interpreting the infant's intuitive attempt to console her. The final stanza suggests the latter. The mother takes the original sense impression and reconstructs it with her creative imagination to give it a meaning.

The narrator presents the emigrant mother as perceiving that the girl is not her son, but as finding "'contentment, hope, and Mother's glee'" in being with her (87). Even

though she strongly identifies the little girl with her son by calling her "'by [her] Darling's name'" and saying her "'features seem to [her] the same,'" the emigrant mother says "'His little Sister thou shalt be'" (90-93). Thus, she achieves a balance between the receptive and creative facets of her imagination. She receives the sense impressions that indicate the girl is not her son and recognizes that the girl is not her own, but she also and at the same time recognizes that the child is enough like her son that she can make her into a close substitute for him. Just as in Jessica Benjamin's description of the mother who feels recognized by her newborn, the emigrant mother not only projects her feelings onto the girl, but also acknowledges that the girl is different from her son:

To experience recognition in the fullest most joyful way, entails the paradox that 'you' who are 'mine' are also different, new, outside of me. It thus includes the sense of loss that you are . . . no longer simply my fantasy of you. (Benjamin 15)<sup>12</sup>

Because of Wordsworth's detailed depiction of recognition, this mother is one of the most fully delineated subjects that he creates. She connects/identifies with another subject, but she does not merge her identity with his (as does the Mad Mother). She does not become, in Lifton's terms, "static" (6). She is aware of and accepts her ability to fantasize and uses that power to mourn her loss. More than any other mother Wordsworth creates, she is overtly self-conscious.

But what about the narrator's depiction of the mother's response to her son? As her experience with the present girl is decidedly one of recognition, her experience with her absent son (or her mental image of him) is one of successful mourning. The mother struggles to put order back into her life after being separated from her country and child by "free[ing] [her]self from the deadness" or absence "of that person" and "retaining a sense of connection with him" (Broken 96). She attempts to create a figure of her son in the girl (to make the girl into her son), but discovers that strategy is ineffective. She then decides to replace him completely with the girl and also finds that approach ineffective. Finally, she accepts her separation from the son and her uncertainty about his absence or death and also accepts that the girl is not her child, but very consciously plays as if she is.<sup>13</sup> Just as the girl will "play" with "grass" and "flowers," the emigrant will play with the child: she "will call [her] by her Darling's name" (89-90). Her mourning play, in effect, allows her to tell the story of her separation from her son. She is not bound by the restrictions of reality and uses the creative and receptive components of her imagination (Wordsworth represents her as doing this) to adjust to the loss of her son. This narrative, or song, represents Lifton's creative mode of immortality: she forms a work that lasts and gives her son, herself and her surrogate daughter immortality. The fact that when she returns to France, she will "tell

[her son] many tales of" the girl not only makes her differentiation between son and surrogate daughter clear, but it also suggests that the emigrant's strategy for mourning the loss of the little girl when she returns to France will be narrative: she will tell her son about "His little sister" (93).<sup>14</sup>

The special complexity of this poem is that Wordsworth overtly represents the poem as the narrator's rendering of the emigrant mother's mourning: "My song the workings of her heart expressed" (14, my emphasis). He appropriates a woman's voice to write his own poem, but he gives his female representation all the powers that he possesses, both receptive and creative powers, the ability to recollect and reconstruct "her" story and construct a complex moment of similitude in dissimilitude. He also represents the mother as being able to represent other characters who tell stories: the mother tells of the nurse who told her: "'Tears should not / Be shed upon an Infant's face / It was unlucky'" (41-43). As in later editions of "Her Eyes Are Wild," Wordsworth eventually adds stanza numbers to each verse paragraph of the song which remind readers that Wordsworth is in control (it is his song, and she is an "object of male representation"), but in representing the mother as telling her story, incorporating the words of others into her story, and achieving a balance of separation and connection, she is not just a "silent" or "vanished" object of "quest" (Homans 40).<sup>15</sup> Just like Wordsworth's

representation of himself in The Prelude, and all subjects represented in poetry, she is an object of Wordsworth's representation; however, she, unlike some poetic objects, is also given a voice, a voice more complex than the sailor's mother, to tell her story. In this poem, Wordsworth depicts mourning and poetic composition in process.

\* \* \*

In "The Affliction of Margaret" Wordsworth also treats a mother's coming to terms with a separation from her child. As in "The Emigrant Mother," this mother is uncertain whether her child is simply absent or actually dead, but unlike any poem I have discussed so far, Wordsworth represents the mother without an explicit narrator to present her story. Interestingly, in the Longman manuscript for Poems, in Two Volumes, Wordsworth does frame the poem with a rather clumsy prologue, which informs readers that the piece is a "doleful plaint . . . . to this effect" (12).<sup>16</sup> The decision to delete the prologue is a bold move for Wordsworth and knowing that he, at one time, planned to frame the poem with a narrator in the fashion of "The Emigrant Mother" and "The Pet-Lamb" allows us to observe his experimentation or play with mothers' voices. Here, we see that this male poet does not always silence women or always frame them with controlling narrators.

The voice that Wordsworth actually grants Margaret, however, is far from stable. With it, he displays this troubled mother's difficulty in finding a narrative with

which to order her experience, to bring continuity to her life. Margaret seems unable to achieve a balance of separation from and connection to her son (by which to mourn her loss) because she cannot achieve a balance of her receptive (perceiving/knowing) and creative (organizing/fusing) imagination in constructing her narrative about him. Since she is uncertain about her son's actual fate, she cannot fashion a figure through which to mourn him. Unlike the emigrant mother who apparently does not need to know her child's actual fate, this mother does. In addition, Margaret's mourning (unlike the sailor's mother's and the emigrant mother's) is complicated by the psychological and emotional loss of abandonment. Again, Wordsworth's representations of mothers display a variety which do not force mothers' subjectivities into a simple paradigm.

Margaret opens the poem with a question which summarizes her problem: "Where art thou, my beloved Son, / Where art thou, worse to me than dead?" (1-2). She pines for her adult son whom she has not seen in "Seven years" (8); he is "worse to [her] than dead" because she does not know whether he is neglecting her or is dead. She is in a predicament because of her uncertainty whether to attribute "blame" to him for neglecting her, or to feel "sorrow" for his death (6-7). Because of her uncertainty, she does not know how to mourn her loss, how to separate herself from her son but at the same time retain a sense of connection to him

enabling her to get on with her life. The mother's problem seems further complicated because she does not have a figure or symbol to help her mourn, to help her overcome her loss. While the sailor's mother uses the son's bird and cage to help her tell her story, and the emigrant mother uses the neighbor girl to help her adjust to the loss of her son and to tell her story, Margaret has no object or figure; she only has language, a language that Wordsworth represents as ultimately failing her. In the next seven stanzas, she attempts to use language to imagine why her son is apart from her and to explain his absence; these are thoughts she "catch[es] at" but "misses," explanations that fail her because they are formed with too much creative imagination (fantasy) and, by necessity, not enough receptive imagination (reality).

In stanza three Margaret offers background about her relationship with her son. She lists his positive qualities in detail: "He was among the prime in worth" and "An object beauteous to behold"; he was also "Well born, well bred" and "ingenuous, innocent, and bold" (15-18). But she only alludes to his problems: "If things ensued that wanted grace, / As hath been said, they were not base; / And never blush was on my face" (19-21). She implies that some people have said he did some scandalous things, but, in her mind, the son's actions were never disgraceful, and she was never ashamed of him. By her logic, since he has nothing to be



ashamed of, flight for wrong-doing could not be a reason for his absence.

In stanza four, however, Margaret attempts to explain her son's absence by suggesting that he does not realize his mother misses and needs him by comparing young children to adult children. She says that young children do not realize the "power" their "scream[s]" have over their mothers; screams are infants' means of telling mothers something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Further, as children grow into adulthood and gradually separate from their mothers, the mothers are still "distress[ed]" by their children: years "do not make [them] love the less" (22-28). She seems to imply that her son does not realize the distress that his absence has caused her, and that might be why he has not returned.

Next, Margaret responds to an implied audience who suggests that her son has simply "Neglect[ed]" her, and she confesses that she "suffer'd long / From that ill thought." But she says that she was "blind" when she believed in this neglect and also when she thought that "Pride" in having been a good mother would comfort her, despite her mistaken perception of the son's "wrong" in neglecting her (28-30). Even though at one time she thought her son might be neglecting her, that answer is unacceptable to her now: she has been too good of a mother, in her mind, for this to happen. Of course, despite the fact that she may have been a "good" mother, the son may still have been a "bad" son.

In stanza six, she creates yet another alternative by blaming herself for the son's absence. Margaret suggests that she pressured him to live up to her expectations when he was a child, to live her vision of how he should live. She now sees with "better eyes" than she did when the son was with her (40) and will accept him even if he is "humbled, poor, / Hopeless of honour and of gain" (36-37); she now "despise[s]" "worldly grandeur" and "fortune with her gifts and lies" (41-42). She suggests that if he will only return, she will love him no matter what his condition.

With stanza seven Margaret jarringly shifts the frame of reference away from her immediate family situation to a more general frame; this time she struggles with constructing a more general metaphor with which to understand her predicament. Previously her explanations had been personal, but in this passage she shifts temporarily to more impersonal language:

Alas! The fowls of Heaven have wings,  
And blasts of Heaven will aid their flight;  
They mount, how short a voyage brings  
The Wanderers back to their delight!  
Chains tie us down by land and sea;  
And wishes, vain as mine, may be  
All that is left to comfort thee. (43-49)

The passage is confusing because Margaret begins in this impersonal mode referring to birds and the ease with which they can return to their homes and compares them to "us," humans (or the mother and son), and their more constrained mobility ("Chains tie us down"). She suggests that the son does not return because he cannot return; he is too distant

and "chained by land and sea." As in the previous stanza, with the closing couplet, she suggests that if he will return, she will comfort him.

In stanza eight Margaret becomes more desperate. The word perhaps signals her continuing speculation about her son's location and attempt at ordering her loss. She imagines that he could be "maim'd" and "mangled" in "a dungeon," trapped in "the Lion's Den," or at the bottom of the ocean in "an incommunicable sleep" (50-56). All of these possibilities would explain why he has not returned to her. However, in the next stanza she determines that since no "Ghosts . . . will force / Their way to" her, the notion that there is "intercourse / Betwixt the living and the dead" must be false. By her very tangled logic, she seems to have accepted the idea (in the alternative of this stanza) that he is dead and denies that his separation is willful.

Yet in the final two stanzas, Margaret reveals that none of the stories she has constructed to explain her son's absence actually satisfies her. The uncertainty of explaining his whereabouts causes her to feel great anxiety: She "dread[s] the rustling of the grass" and "the very shadows of the clouds" (65-66). The objects she attends to are appropriate for her condition of uncertainty. Unlike the sailor's mother and the emigrant mother who have tangible objects to help them mourn, Margaret has only rustling grass and shadows of clouds--fluid, amorphous

objects. These unstable objects are congruent with the instability of her narrative and her uncertainty about her son's whereabouts. Although she continues to try, she cannot find a figure to help her order her experience and express the depth of her pain: "I question things and do not find / One that will answer to my mind; / And all the world appears unkind" (70). She strives to tell her story accurately and appropriately mourn her loss; however, she does not have the necessary information, so she cannot satisfactorily order the story. In terms of Wordsworth's poetics, she relies too much on the creative facet of her imagination because the stimulus for her receptive imagination is limited. Consequently, in Lifton's terms, she is unable "to reconstruct shattered personal forms [her relationship with her son] in ways that reassert vitality and integrity" (170). Because of her anxiety and uncertainty, her attempt at creatively symbolizing her story is fragmented and diffuse, and this fragmentation leads to what Lifton calls "psychic numbing" or a passive stasis with which the poem concludes: her "troubles" are "beyond relief" and she feels that no one, besides her son, or "tidings" from him, can help her.

In this poem, Wordsworth constructs a mother and gives her a first-person voice without propping her up with a controlling narrator. Even though Margaret is the most vocal of the mothers I have examined, she cannot free herself from her lost child and reorganize the loss in a

form which allows her to remain connected to him while at the same time accept her separation from him. The uncertainty of his fate causes her to dart among several different possibilities in her story. Wordsworth certainly represents her as a desiring subject, but he figures her desire as endless; she cannot settle on a healing symbol by which to mourn her son. Yet despite Margaret's failure at mourning her loss, the voice that Wordsworth constructs her as having does accurately depict the pain of the mother's failure.

Both the emigrant mother and Margaret deal with uncertainty in their mourning in very real terms. Neither of them knows whether their child is dead or just absent. With this uncertainty Wordsworth explores the range of the "receptive" imagination in that neither of these mothers have the sensory data to know of their children's whereabouts, while the sailor's mother does know that her son is dead, at the bottom of the sea. The emigrant mother can "play" with the girl, who is tangible and "there," to mourn, but Margaret has no substantial object for her receptive imagination to use in her mourning. Margaret's lack of a concrete stimulus and her compensation with her creative imagination help explain why her tale is so fluid and fragmented. In these poems Wordsworth, very subtly, displays the dynamic between the two types of imagination which he develops throughout his poetics.

### **Suffering in Silence: Mothers Mourning Differently in Later Poems**

In two later poems, Wordsworth also explores mothers' separations from their sons. As in the pieces from Poems, in Two Volumes, the sons are absent, and the mothers try to mourn their losses, yet unlike the mothers whose mourning we have just examined, these mothers are noticeably less vocal. Wordsworth does not construct these later mothers in a way that enables them to speak as extensively for themselves; he instead relies on narrators who tell the mothers' stories. In "The Force of Prayer" (1815) the mother only speaks one line and constructs an edifice to memorialize her son and mourn her loss. In "The Widow on Windermere" (1842), the mother does not speak at all and mourns her son by imagining an angelic "transfiguration" of him. In these later poems, as Wordsworth constructs the mothers with reduced powers of speech, they become objects.

In "The Force of Prayer," Wordsworth presents another mother, like the sailor's mother, who has been separated from her child by death.<sup>17</sup> In this poem she mourns her son through prayer and by building a priory as a monument to him. The narrator reports few of the mother's words, and instead emphasizes the building of a priory as her means of mourning. Although she does not have access to complex linguistic representation, this mother does separate from her son while retaining a degree of connection to him by constructing an architechtonic figure to memorialize him.

The poem's introductory section opens with a sort of epigraph which is printed in a medieval-looking type: "What is good for a bootless bene?" (1). The narrator translates this line, "whence can comfort spring / When Prayer is of no avail?" (3-4). This epigraph prepares readers for a poem which mostly concerns the mother's mourning the loss of her son. In the next two stanzas the narrator then recounts a Falconer's repeating the epigraph to his Lady and the Lady's interpretation from the "look of [his] eye" and the "love which was in her soul" for her son (9-12) that her son Romilly has died.

In the main action of the poem, the narrator flashes back to the moment Romilly has died. He and his greyhound are walking through the woods hunting for deer when the two reach the "fearful" and "tempting" "chasm" which is called "Wharf" where they walk along the path adjacent to Wharf, "THE STRID" (17-19, sic 28). The boy bounds across the Strid "in glee" as he had done almost a hundred times despite the steep rocks and rushing water, but without warning, the greyhound "hung back, / And checked him in his leap" (28-32). The boy falls "in the arms of Wharf, / And [is] strangled by a merciless force" (34-35). "Wharf" becomes almost character-like as the narrator personifies the chasm as a merciless stranger.

The narrator carefully differentiates between the mother's response to her son's death and a response she might have for a lover's death:

If for a Lover the Lady wept,  
 A solace she might borrow  
 From death, and from the passion of death;--  
 Old Wharf might heal her sorrow. (41-44)

To end the pain of losing a lover, the narrator suggests she might have thrown herself into Wharf and halted that pain with her own death: ironically, Wharf might "heal" her sadness by killing her. However, the melancholy she feels is not a lover's but is "a Mother's sorrow" (48). The "hope" she bore for Romilly was "farther-looking" in that it looks to the future of the family line (47-48). This mother concerns herself her son with what Lifton calls the "biological mode" of immortality, or "the sense of living on through and in one's sons and daughters and their sons and daughters" (Life 32). The narrator makes clear that he was "a Tree that stood alone"--he had no siblings--and that the "Root" of this tree "Was in her Husband's grave!" (49-52). She does not view this loss as a repetition of the loss of her husband which suggests that, unlike the mother of "Her Eyes Are Wild," she can define her identity in relationships besides the one with her child. This mother does not see her child as a substitute for her husband, but something beyond her husband. Romilly represents not only a continuation of both his mother and father's existence, but also the continuation of their family lines. There is no way to regain this continuity since father and son are dead.

The remedy for the mother's pain is a long time in coming. After sitting silently "Long, long in darkness"



trying to come to terms with her son's death, her "first words" are "'Let there be / In Bolton on the field of Wharf / A stately Priory'" (54-56). In her silence, she has determined a figure with which she can mourn her loss: first she forms words, and her words instigate the construction of the priory. Like the sailor's mother, she substitutes something for her absent child to help relieve a sorrow she previously considered "ENDLESS" (sic 7); however, unlike the sailor's mother's bird, this object must be physically constructed. Wordsworth's diction in describing the construction is telling in that the Priory is "reared," a word which is also associated with raising children and which points back to the mother's previous concern with the family line (57). Since she can no longer "rear" Romilly, she can at least rear a figure to replace him, to insure his memory, and to guarantee the memory of the family line. In this way, the mother operates in Lifton's creative mode by producing a figure which will insure both Romilly's and the family's memory. The priory is not just a substitute for her son, but a structure that she recognizes as fulfilling part of the son's function while at the same time remaining separate from her son.

We can also read the mother's mourning in terms of Wordsworth's poetics. Even though she does not create a complex linguistic figure, Wordsworth does give us a glimpse of her creative process. She sits "Long, long in darkness" before she develops a form with which to memorialize her

son. In a sense, she "recollects in tranquillity" before developing a figure with which to commemorate her son.

The fact that the building she constructs is a priory, a religious building, suggests that the edifice functions in something like Lifton's theological mode. The building also becomes a testament to her faith in God, and it is not only the building of the priory that gives her succor, but also her prayers, her words to God. If there is a God, then Romilly is not forever separated from her, and she can be reconnected to him. Both the building of the priory and her faith in God and heaven enable the mother to mourn her loss, "to separate from" Romilly "while retaining a sense of connection with him" (Broken 96). Substituting the building for him insures his memory (the building is not him, but reminds her and others of him) and her faith allows her to accept his death and absence but also his presence in heaven and her eventual reconnection with him. Prayer, her words to God, enable her to maintain this connection:

And the Lady prayed in heaviness  
That looked not for relief:  
But slowly did her succour come,  
And a patience to her grief. (61-64)

Unlike Margaret, this mother's grief reaches an end. She has formed a stable figure through which to mourn her loss. Language through prayer (talking with God) is part of her healing process, but the figure she initiates is more concrete.

Wordsworth presents yet another woman who speaks and mourns by different means. Like the sailor's mother, the emigrant mother, and Margaret, Romilly's mother also has the power to make a figure and even speak, but her narrative powers are less apparent. She initiates the building of the priory with her words, and we are told that she prays, but her voice is more limited in the poem than the sailor's mother. While Wordsworth does not represent her as fully as the early mothers, she is, nonetheless, not a silent object, and we see and hear her expressions of desire. Yet the fact that she is less vocal and that she is more explicitly framed by the narrator does suggest Wordsworth's more objectifying approach toward representing women in his later work.

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Wordsworth also treats the separation of a mother from her children in "The Widow on Windermere Side," and like "The Force of Prayer" (and much of his later work) this three-part sonnet sequence has a Christian theme. However, here, the mother has no voice at all; the narrator completely tells her story. Neither does she construct an external figure to help her mourn the loss of her son. Her figuration is entirely internal: she imagines that her son has been "transfigured" and visits her in the form of an angel. In this poem, the mother Wordsworth represents has no powers of production, and consequently, she cannot bring

continuity to her life, so that death becomes her only means of attaining salvation.

In the first sonnet the narrator reveals that a woman was widowed and left in debt by her husband through no fault of her own. Instead of complaining about what "evil Fortune" has done to her, she struggles to repay the creditors for "her conscience sake," and also so that she and her children can "stand upright / In the world's eye" (5, 7, 8-9).<sup>18</sup> Despite her display of courage, "evil Fortune" seems to have hurtful designs on her. Even though local legend has it that the woman worked constantly to pay the debt and "never slept . . . . one by one, the hand of death assailed / Her children" (13-14). The juxtaposition of the woman's valiant strivings to pay her debt with the revelation of her children's deaths creates a world in which "clean living" does not lead to a reward; Wordsworth represents an irrational world in which good works or intentions do not necessarily lead to a good end: death completely separates her from her family, and she is left alone.

After the children die, "The Mother mourned, nor ceased her tears to flow" until on a "winter's noon-day" her most recently dead son "appears before her eyes" (15-16). After seeing this vision of him which is whiter and "brighter" than snow, the mother trusts that she will no longer "grieve or pine" (20, 24). Very literally, this vision represents a symbolization in Lifton's theological mode: she is sure of

her son's immortality because she has seen an angelic version of him. The narrator's emphasis on the son as an "appearance" and the visual detail with which the image is portrayed suggest that the "Transfigured" son is a hallucination, an imaginative representation. As in Lifton's mode of experiential transcendence, the widow enters into a "psychic state so intense that time and death disappear." She experiences a state of "ecstasy or rapture [in which] the restrictions of the senses . . . no longer exist" (Life 32-33). The snow is "dazzling," but the son is "far brighter" than "these elements can show" (22). As a representation, the imagined son becomes a figure with which to replace all her lost children; like the sailor's mother and Romilly's mother, she appears to have a form to help her end her mourning, to end her "pining and grieving" for her dead children, to bring continuity to her chaotic life. Like Margaret, this woman uses her creative imagination to fill in where her receptive imagination cannot, but the widow's figure satisfies her while Margaret cannot formulate one that works for her.

She does not, however, simply have a vision which she can later tell about to order her loss, but instead she continues to see this vision. In fact, a closer look at the narrator's description suggests that the widow continues to mourn, that she does not complete her mourning:

Much she rejoiced, trusting that from that hour  
Whate'er befell she could not grieve or pine;  
But the Transfigured, in and out of season,

Appeared, and spiritual presence gained a power  
 Over material forms that mastered reason.  
 Oh gracious heaven, in pity make her thine.  
 (23-28)

The narrator says the mother "trust[ed]" that she would no longer grieve or pine, "But the Transfigured" continues to appear regularly; even though her visions are rapturous, they become an obsession for the mother. She does not use the vision (the creative imagination) in tandem with "material forms" (the receptive imagination) to separate from her son while maintaining a sense of connection to him (to mourn him), but abandons the receptive imagination in favor of the creative imagination, "spiritual presence." Her mourning work is skewed; she does not balance separation with connection and continues to see visions of her son. Like Margaret, she seems unable to move on with her life.

The conclusion of the second sonnet suggests that the narrator believes the widow deserves heaven's pity because she has lost her mind and should be "assailed" by death to end her pain: "Oh, gracious Heaven, in pity make her thine!" However, the narrator changes his opinion of her irrationality by recanting his initial death-wish for the widow: to judge the only good that could come to her as coming through death is to "judge amiss" (31). "Reason [has] failed" her so "want is her threatened doom" (she probably cannot physically take care of herself, so she will live in want), but "frequent transports mitigate the gloom" (reconnecting with her son relieves her desire) (32-33).

The narrator emphasizes that she is not a raving lunatic who "kiss[es] the air" or "laugh[s] upon a precipice" (35) like the Mad Mother. She has a purpose in her life, faith in the afterlife, and exists peacefully, "suffering[] toward the tomb" and smiling "as if a martyr's crown were won" (36-37). The transports with her son tell her that despite the "gloom" she experiences on earth, in heaven, as an angel like her son, she will experience "angelic glory" (42).

Unlike Margaret who cannot use shadows of clouds and grass to make sense of her loss, the widow does use malleable, amorphous objects to create a figure of her son: "when light breaks through clouds or waving trees . . . . The Mother hails in her descending son / An Angel" (38-40). However, the widow simply makes a substitute for her son with her creative imagination, and does not use the figure she creates to move on with her life, to create a sense of continuity as do the sailor's mother, the emigrant's mother, and Romilly's mother. She sees, over and over again ("in and out of season") the vision of her son, so that her life is essentially over. As the narrator informs us, she passes "through strange sufferings toward the tomb," "smiles as if a martyr's crown were won," and begins her "angelic glory" (36-37, 42). This mother's mourning will only truly end when she dies. The only real purpose to her life now is death.

With this final poem, Wordsworth limits the mother's powers of production completely. The widow does not speak

at all, and her powers of figuration are entirely internal: she does not produce an object or a story to memorialize her loss. Wordsworth represents her re-ordering as much more imaginative, transcendental, visual, and perhaps unconscious. Her "angelic glory" seems predicated on a relationship with her son: the ecstatic visions she has of her son and not "Her work" to repay her husband's debt give this woman's life its value. This woman has a sort of visionary power, but she cannot organize that power to recover from her loss and bring continuity to her life.

\*   \*   \*

In all of these poems Wordsworth represents women who actively struggle to endure their losses and strive to bring continuity to their lives. In portraying mothers who express desire and satisfy their desires to varying degrees, he represents women who are not simply objects of desire themselves. Indeed, their symbolizations or works of mourning are like the poet's constructions of poems. Both the poet and the mothers strive to recollect or re-order an original experience or person to simultaneously accept their separation from it and maintain a sense of connection to it. We can read Wordsworth's experiments with mother's voices in mourning as experiments with his theories of poetic composition.

Over time, Wordsworth's willingness to attribute the same poetic powers to mothers that he does to poets seems to wane. However, in an early poem like "The Emigrant Mother"



his disposition to represent that mother with all the poetic powers that he possesses suggests that Wordsworth's attitude towards mothers (and women) is more complex and less consistent than critics have supposed. While Wordsworth continues to value mothers' perspectives throughout his career, the early Wordsworth tends to construct women more fully as subjects than the later Wordsworth.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle (14-17) for his description of the fort/da game.

<sup>2</sup> Lifton discusses additional modes in The Broken Connection. See also Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" for more on mourning in general and the relationship between mourning and artistic temperments.

<sup>3</sup> These two facets of poetic composition parallel nicely with Coleridge's formulation of the primary imagination, "the living power and prime agent of all human perception," and the secondary imagination, "it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate . . . it struggles to idealize and unify" (Biographia Literaria 1.175)

<sup>4</sup> All citations for "The Sailor's Mother," "The Emigrant Mother," and "The Affliction of Margaret" refer to the Cornell edition of Poems, in Two volumes, edited by Jared Curtis.

<sup>5</sup> Wordsworth later revised these lines to "What is it that you bear . . . Beneath the covert of your cloak." This diction is less precise than the original and makes the implication of pregnancy more obvious.

<sup>6</sup> Judith B. Herman makes an interesting connection of the caged bird and Roman matron references to a letter Plutarch sent consoling "his wife upon the death of their infant daughter." She says, "Plutarch appeals to his wife to bear her sorrow like a Roman matron . . . and then he . . . compares the experience of the soul . . . to that of a captive bird: 'It alights again and re-enters the body, and does not leave off or cease from becoming entangled in the passions and fortunes of this world through repeated births.'" Herman says that Wordsworth's reference, though of course it cannot be directly connected to Plutarch's letter, "does seem to point, in a general way, to the

ancient beliefs about the life of the soul which the sailor's mother unknowingly carries on." Herman argues that Wordsworth "lets the sailor's mother reveal, by her own story, that on some level of belief that bird in the bird-cage embodies her dead son" (302). From this perspective, we can see the bird and cage in alignment with Lifton's "theological mode" of mourning.

<sup>7</sup> Wordsworth revised lines 9-11 three times after the original (1820, 1827, 1843). All three of the versions focus on the narrator's translation of his version of what the mother might say. In the 1827 and all subsequent editions he refers to the poem as a "lay" (10).

<sup>8</sup> See chapter four (144) for my discussion of the narrative frame for "The Pet-Lamb".

<sup>9</sup> By framing the song with a narrator, Wordsworth illustrates his practice of poetic identification, of the poet's "slip[ing] into an entire delusion, and even confound[ing] and identify[ing] his own feelings with" those he describes in order to make his poetry more realistic (Preface 49).

<sup>10</sup> In some instances of my analysis of "The Emigrant Mother" my language might suggest that the language of the mother's song is her own and not the narrator constructing her song. I do this so that the my prose will not become too convoluted. I should emphasize, again, that the mother's song is the narrator's construction.

<sup>11</sup> See chapter four (169) for more on Wordsworth's use of the dash in "Her Eyes Are Wild."

<sup>12</sup> Although Benjamin's description characterizes a mother and her biological child, her characterization also applies to the "mother" and "child" in the poem.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Rubin Suleiman argues persuasively in "Playing and Motherhood; or, How to Get the Most Out of the Avant-Garde" that playing is

the activity through which the human subject most freely and inventively constitutes herself or himself. To play is to affirm an "I," an autonomous subjectivity that exercises control over a world of possibilities; at the same time, and contrarily, it is in playing that the I can experience itself in its most fluid and boundaryless state. (280)

In addition, she says that "To imagine the mother playing is to recognize her most fully as a creative subject-- autonomous and free, yet (or for that reason?) able to take

the risk of "infinite expansion" that goes with creativity." (280).

<sup>14</sup> I should emphasize that the poem is not clear on whether the son is alive or dead.

<sup>15</sup> Wordsworth added stanza numbers to the mother's song in the 1836 Poetical Works of William Wordsworth and in all subsequent editions.

<sup>16</sup> In the Longman manuscript in which Wordsworth titled the poem "The Affliction of Mary -- of --," Wordsworth frames the poem with an opening stanza:

This book, which strives to express in tuneful  
sound  
The joys and sorrows which through life abound,  
(Some great, some small, some frequent, and some  
rare,  
Yet all observ'd or felt and truly there)  
May in the following pages, which are penn'd  
From general motives, gain a private end:  
This little wandering Book (for who can say  
Into what coverts it shall find it's [sic] way)  
May reach, perchance, the very Man, whose ear  
Knows nothing of what many Strangers hear,  
Whether through his mishap or his neglect:  
A doleful plaint it is, to this effect.

<sup>17</sup> "The Force of Prayer" was first published as a companion piece to The White Doe of Rylstone in 1815.

<sup>18</sup> In this instance, I rely on the De Selincourt edition of Wordsworth's works (2.94-95); "The Widow on Windermere" is not included in any of the current volumes of The Cornell Wordsworth.

## CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

Wordsworth, like the other male Romantics, is [often] seen as an appropriator of women and the feminine for an exclusively male poetic enterprise which ultimately denies women their subjectivity and value. The poet, according to these readers, is alternately figured as a rapist, a conqueror, a cannibal, or a capitalist. But Wordsworth and his poetry are more complicated than the assumptions behind these metaphors would suggest. If we assume from the beginning that an interpretive grid fits Wordsworth, then we lose the richness, variety, and complexity of his poetry. While it is true in some poems Wordsworth reveals this male desire to cr mourn her drowprieate the feminine and to objectify female characters, in others he identifies both with women and with qualities conventionally associated with the feminine.

Judith Page, Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women

This study complicates many of the prevailing notions about William Wordsworth's representations of mothers. Wordsworth does not steadfastly conflate mothers with Nature in such a way that he invariably constructs women as silent or absent objects of male quest. In fact, he explores a variety of mothers' voices throughout his career, and in some cases explicitly associates mothers with language acquisition and poetic composition. In early work he tends to acknowledge mothers' significance directly in his poetry and poetics and his mothers tend to be more vocal, while in later work and revisions he tends to conceal mothers' significance and construct them as more object-like.

The central issue here has been the dynamic of "similitude in dissimilitude." I labeled this dynamic

maternal because Wordsworth locates it in the child's early relationship with the mother in book two of The Prelude and says that it is the source of "the poetic spirit." In early editions of book two Wordsworth demonstrates how a child's sense of connection with and separation from a mother perceived as another person places a child in a sort of "transitional realm" (to borrow Winnicott's term)--a space of emergent organization that gives an infant the freedom to experiment and organize with the creative imagination but which also provides the safety of perceiving the outside world as it is with the receptive imagination.

In "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth says that perceiving similitude in dissimilitude is the source of poetic pleasure, and this dynamic structures many of his poetic theories. While similitude in dissimilitude opens a space for creativity for the infant in The Prelude, Wordsworth also uses the dynamic to situate poetry in relation to prose, place the Poet in relation to other "men," describe the relationship between the Poet and his subjects, and explain the way meter functions. In addition, in Wordsworth's discussion of the purpose of his collection, "to follow the fluxes and refluxes of the mind," he repeatedly represents his exploration in terms of separation and connection and associates this dynamic with mothers. In early editions Wordsworth associates the dynamic with mothers in each of these theories and his purpose, but as he

revises and restructures the Preface, the significance of mothers is gradually elided even though the "maternal" dynamic remains. By labeling this dynamic maternal, I have taken a radical step in making apparent the significance of mothers in Wordsworth's formulation of his poetics.

In poems about actual mothers, the maternal dynamic is significant and overt. We can see how it is manifest in the relationship between represented mothers and children and also between narrators and the mothers they represent. Some mothers, like the Mad Mother, Margaret, and the Widow on Windermere, cannot achieve a balance of separation and connection, and their narratives illustrate the fragmented nature of their mental experiences. They do not achieve a balance of the creative and receptive facets of the imagination. On the other hand, the sailor's mother, the emigrant's mother, and Romilly's mother all successfully mourn their sons to varying degrees and in different ways; the language of their narratives illustrates a balance of the creative and receptive facets of their imaginations. Indeed, with some of these mothers, Wordsworth illustrates his concept of poetic composition as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which "takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity," so they become much more than silent objects of quest and are constructed as makers of poetry.

Examining different versions of the poetry and prose has been one of my central strategies for investigating and

understanding how Wordsworth's use of the maternal dynamic changes over the span of his career. Most notably in The Prelude we have seen how Wordsworth's depiction of the shift from mother to Nature alters our understanding of how he conceptualizes the poetic spirit. Several critics have observed how the shift allows us to make more informed social and political judgments about Wordsworth. But instead of focusing on the shift from the early, pantheistic, radical, outsider Wordsworth to the later Christian, conservative, Poet Laureate Wordsworth, I have shown how we can use this shift to make judgments about Wordsworth in terms of gender.

Another strategy I have followed has been to examine works outside Wordsworth's great decade of production (1797-1807) and to examine poems that have received little or no attention.<sup>1</sup> For example, scholars rarely mention "The Force of Prayer" except in relation to The White Doe of Rylstone, they sometimes mention the very complex and interesting "The Emigrant Mother" but almost never read it, and critics rarely mention "The Widow on Windermere." By examining these non-canonical works, I have shown that generalizing accurately about his work is a difficult and dangerous approach, that Wordsworth wrote about mothers in a variety of ways. I believe that a much more productive methodology than making broad generalizations is to examine different versions of his work from different periods, to look for the

consistencies and inconsistencies in his poetic practice, and to speculate about why he falls into or breaks particular patterns.

Poetic anxiety is the primary cause I have suggested helped produce the way Wordsworth changes his attitudes about mothers, and the way he uses the maternal dynamic.<sup>2</sup> As he revises, he reduces the significance of the influence of the mother-child bond on "the poetic spirit," and distances mothers from his poetics; in addition, in his later work, he tends to represent mothers more as silent objects and less as desiring subjects. The anxiety seems to be rooted in a desire to be a strong, independent poet. As a number of contemporary reviews which characterize Wordsworth as a "histerical [sic] schoolgirl" and a borrower from "plebeian nurseries" suggest, explicitly associating his poetics with mothers might risk greater denigration by critics (Reiman 40, 431). By removing gendered associations of mothers with the dynamic of similitude in dissimilitude while retaining the importance of the dynamic, Wordsworth can fashion himself as a more independent and "masculine" figure.

However, some might wish to argue that Wordsworth's revisions and shift of emphasis is a healthy move instead of a sort of repression or denial of mothers' significance. From this perspective, some might view Wordsworth as incorporating the mother into his poetics in order to become a stronger, more self-sufficient poet. While this reading is an arguable one, I tend to view Wordsworth's erasure of



the mother more negatively because I think it conceals the significance of connection and identification in Wordsworth's poetry and poetics. By examining his poetry through the lens of mothers, we are more likely to apprehend the significance of separation and connection, of dissimilitude and similitude, instead of focusing on the separation and dissimilitude that a look through the lens of children foregrounds.

My emphasis on viewing the balance of separation and connection in Wordsworth's poetry could be the starting point for a larger exploration of Wordsworth's poetry. I think there has been a reductive tendency in romantic studies (and literary/cultural studies in general) to isolate phenomena which are opposites, like separation and connection, to trope them as "masculine" and "feminine," to show how "male writers" may fall into the "masculine" category and "female writers" fall into the "feminine" category, and then to value one category over the other.<sup>3</sup> In general, when a male writer exhibits a "feminine" characteristic, he is seen as "cross-dressing" or perhaps appropriating these feminine characteristics for his own selfish gain. In fact, several recent readings of Wordsworth seem to suggest that whenever he uses a mother's voice, tries to identify with her position, or tropes Nature as a mother he makes use of the mother's qualities for his own gain.<sup>4</sup> However, I believe that without a sort of appropriation, empathy and understanding cannot occur. If a

poet cannot imaginatively place her/himself in the position of another (male/female, black/red/white/yellow, lower/middle/upper class), then s/he cannot begin to understand that person's position. Wordsworth's self-consciousness in taking on other persons'/characters' voices, as in "The Pet-Lamb" and "The Emigrant Mother," demonstrates that he is aware of what he is doing and is willing to display his identification, which many read as negative appropriation. From my perspective, Wordsworth's self-disclosure transforms many of his seeming acts of appropriation into more positive acts of identification.

In my consideration of Wordsworth and gender, I have not assigned particular characteristics to gendered categories, but I have explored how Wordsworth genders particular characteristics (separation and connection) and then gradually reduces the significance of gender. I have tried to emphasize the value of both separation and connection as Wordsworth uses them in his poetry. Yoking these qualities together in the figure of the mother and the mother-child relationship makes this possible. At times, I may have stressed connection and identification more because Wordsworth is generally classed as more "isolated," "individuated," or "manly" than other male romantic poets, but my aim has been to show the significance of connection and separation, identification and individuation, similitude and dissimilitude in Wordsworth's poetic system. I believe

other critics could make useful strides in studies of Wordsworth, gender, and romantic literature in general if they would explore the works in terms of separation and connection without privileging one over the other.

In particular, one strategy for critiquing the notion of appropriation in Wordsworth's poetry might be an examination of poems in which male characters possess mothering characteristics. Wordsworth depicts male characters who function as mothers in "Michael," (1798), "The Brothers" (1800), and book six of The Excursion (1116-1191) (1814), but in all these poems the mothering duties seem more like acts of empathy and understanding than a negative appropriation.<sup>5</sup> These poems could be usefully compared to poems such as "The Westmoreland Girl" (1845) and "Grace Darling" (1845), late poems in which female characters possess more traditionally "masculine" characteristics (i.e., physical strength, heroism, and bravery).

Another strategy for critiquing Wordsworth's seeming appropriation might be to examine further the relationship between Wordsworth and the narrators he constructs in the mother-poems. As I demonstrate, Wordsworth consistently frames mother-poems with a narrator, and I suggest that this allows him to construct mothers without directly identifying with them. However, a continuing analysis of narrator, mother, and child, might reveal even more about Wordsworth's attitudes toward mothers; this examination could be expanded

to examine the relationship an even more complicated, triadic balance of the boundaries among poet, speaker, and subject. Adding these third terms would complicate the dynamic and force critics to look beyond the structure of subject (in this case "mother") and other ("child"). Attending to these third terms would also focus greater attention on poets' methods and means of representation instead of examining the situations they depict in literature as a "reality."

A final, broader means of critiquing poetic appropriation is to investigate how other contemporary writers represent mothers. In particular, a look at how female writers construct mothers could be revealing. W. M. Rossetti published Augusta Webster's Mother & Daughter: An Uncompleted Sonnet Sequence (1895) near the end of the nineteenth century, this woman's collection, who was a mother herself, would provide an interesting contrast with Wordsworth's poems. In addition, Dorothy Wordsworth depicts mothers in several of her poems like "An Address to a Child in a High Wind," "Loving and Liking: Irregular Verses Addressed to a Child," "A Cottager to her Infant," and especially "The Mother's Return."<sup>6</sup> Not only are Dorothy's poems worthwhile reading in their own right, but exploring the way she (an unmarried and childless woman) constructs and identifies with mothers would also provide an interesting perspective from which to read William's mother-poems. In addition, one of Wordsworth's precursors, Joanna

Baillie, could offer further insight. Several critics have suggested that Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" (1798) from A Series of Plays influenced Wordsworth's poetics in the Preface. In her recently discovered Poems (1790), Baillie (like Dorothy, an unmarried, childless woman) presents a mother-child relationship from the mother's perspective in "A Mother to Her Waking Infant."<sup>7</sup> Comparing representations of mothers by mothers and non-mothers, might lead to a more complete critique of poetic appropriation.

My hope is that my study will encourage readers to go beyond reading Wordsworth's work, and all literature, in terms of a comfortable set of gendered opposites by which they may make easy generalizations that confirm preconceived social and political notions. By examining poems about mothers, poems that critics rarely attend to in the Wordsworth canon, in terms of the maternal dynamic of recognition, I hope that I have made the poems more readily accessible and complicated our understanding of Wordsworth and gender. We can begin to read Wordsworth, as Alan Richardson advises, not simply as "a male writer as subject" who constructs "woman (usually conflated with nature) as object" (22), but as a more complex writer who struggles with gender issues and experiments with his representations of women in a variety of ways. Certainly, Wordsworth does not consistently champion mothers' subjectivities, but neither does he always objectify mothers. Instead of reading Wordsworth only as the manly conqueror who controls

a Nature troped as mother or who values mothers simply as women whose powers he wishes to appropriate, I believe we must also read him as a poet who constructs mothers as subjects with which to identify in their own right, subjects who strive to understand their positions in relation to others. This is the Wordsworth I have endeavored to uncover.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Judith Page's Wordsworth and the Cultivation of Women is a notable exception.

<sup>2</sup> Harold Bloom discusses a sort of male, Oedipal anxiety in which poets may experience anxiety because of their relationship with a "poetic father" in The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry.

<sup>3</sup> I am thinking of Anne Mellor's Romanticism and Gender in particular. Mellor is often criticized for "over-generalizing" because critics fail to note her caveat:

The canonized male-authored texts of what we have been taught to call English literary Romanticism share certain attitudes and ideological investments which differ markedly from those displayed by the female-authored texts of the period. In emphasizing these large differences, I am fully aware that many individual exceptions exist, in the writings of both men and women, exceptions which I shall try to acknowledge"

Mellor is correct in noting these exceptions, but I believe many of her readers are not as diligent in noting the exceptions.

<sup>4</sup> I am thinking of Ross's The Contours of Masculine Desire and Richardson's "Romanticism and the Colonization of the Feminine" in particular.

<sup>5</sup> My reading of "The Brothers" in chapter three could be a useful starting place.

<sup>6</sup> See Susan Levin's Dorothy Wordsworth and Romanticism for a useful collection of Dorothy's poems.

<sup>7</sup> Not until 1984 did Roger Lonsdale identify a copy of Joanna Baillie's anonymously published Poems (1790) in his

New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse. Until then, the collection was only known from a passing reference in Baillie's later collection, Fugitive Verses (1840). However, with the publication of Jonathan Wordsworth's Woodstock facsimile edition from the very important Revolution and Romanticism, 1789-1834 reprint series, the collection is now widely available.

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## **VITA**

Robert C. Hale was born the fifth of five sons to Barbara Tuttle and William McCanless Hale in Morristown, Tennessee in 1965. Rob earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Tennessee in 1988 and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. After teaching high school for two years and selling books for a year, he began graduate work in English at Louisiana State University in 1991 where he served as Co-President of the English Graduate Student Association in 1993-94 and received the Alumni Association Teaching Assistant Award in 1995. He earned his Master of Arts degree in the Spring of 1995 and his Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Fall of 1996. Rob currently lives in Texas and teaches nineteenth and twentieth-century British literature at Texas A & M University at Kingsville. His present research interests include nineteenth-century British and American literature, psychoanalytic theory and criticism, pedagogy, and collections of poetry.



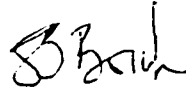
## DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

**Candidate:** Robert C. Hale

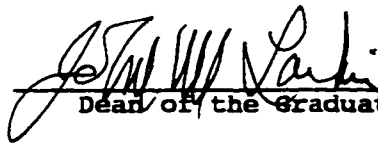
**Major Field:** English

**Title of Dissertation:** Wordsworth's Mother Tongue: Identification, Separation, and Recognition

**Approved:**

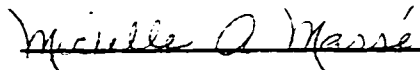



Major Professor and Chairman

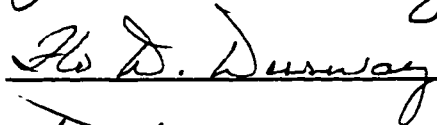


Dean of the Graduate School

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

 (Co-Chair)







**Date of Examination:**

7/29/96